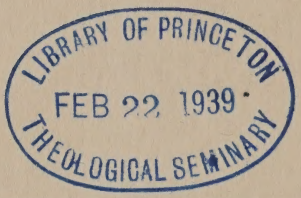
THE PROBLEM OF FOLLOWING JESUS



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The problem of following
Jesus

THE PROBLEM OF FOLLOWING JESUS

Books by

JAMES GORDON GILKEY

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SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE LIVING
THE CERTAINTY OF GOD
SOLVING LIFE'S EVERYDAY PROBLEMS
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WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE?
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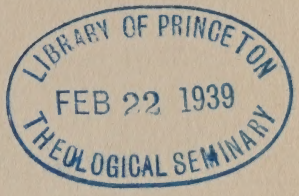

By

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To

the members of the South Church of Springfield,
who for more than twenty years
have welcomed me to their hearts
and permitted me to preach
with utter freedom

FOREWORD

In 1865 Francis Turner Palgrave, the English poet, gave this suggestive account of the difficulty of following Jesus in that day.

Thou sayest: Take up thy cross
O Man, and follow me!
The night is black, our feet are slack,
Yet would we follow thee.

But, O dear Lord, we cry
That we thy face could see!
Thy blessed face one moment's space—
Then might we follow thee.

Dim tracts of Time divide
Those golden days from me,
Thy voice comes strange o'er years of change—
How can I follow thee?

Comes faint and far thy voice
From vales of Galilee,
The vision fades in ancient shades—
How should we follow thee? [1]

[1] Now published as a hymn in the Authorized Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church (1916), p. 314.

verses is essential if the logic of my arguments is to be plain. The third point is the most important of all. I have deliberately refrained from stating my own answers to the many questions raised in the concluding chapters of the book. The purpose of this volume is to enumerate some of the problems which emerge when a modern Christian tries to follow Jesus, and to show why these problems emerge: it is not to state my own theory as to the way in which each of these problems should be solved. To make such a statement would mean, of course, either writing a second book or expanding unduly the dimensions of the present one.

JAMES GORDON GILKEY

January, 1938
Springfield, Massachusetts

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THE PROBLEM OF FOLLOWING JESUS

CHAPTER ONE

Three Contrasting Interpretations of Jesus

I

WITHIN American Protestantism today we find three different conceptions of Jesus. The first is a conception which assumes the verbal infallibility of the Bible, and which then pieces together the many different statements about Jesus made (or said to be made) in different parts of the New Testament or the Old—regarding each statement as true in every detail. Thus a composite picture of Jesus is finally created, a picture which might fairly be entitled "The Jesus of the Biblical record." A contemporary writer of the ultra-conservative school thus describes that Jesus. "The Miracle Man! He came to us by a miracle, and he left us by a miracle. His life was one continuous miracle. He was so full of power that the laws of Nature were counteracted at his wish, so full of goodness that the demons were forced to admit his sanctity, so full of life that even the grave could not hold him. This Miracle Man is eternal in time, omnipotent in power, omniscient in intellect, sovereign in his actions. He sealed his tremendous claims by constant manifestations of his miracu-

lous power, by a sinless life, by a sacrificial death, and by resurrection from the dead. The Book which describes him (the Bible) gives him no less than five hundred names, titles and offices. Some of them are the highest conceivable—Almighty God, Saviour of the World, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. No other character in history could fill even one of these names and offices, but all of them are wonderfully and harmoniously combined in the marvellous, matchless Miracle Man—our Lord Jesus Christ." [1] For each of these extraordinary statements this author can quote a proof-text culled from some part of the New Testament or the Old. He has assumed that all these proof-texts are accurate in every detail, and he has then combined them to produce this portrait of Jesus—the Jesus of the Biblical record.

The second of the current conceptions of Jesus is entirely different. It assumes that the Bible, far from being an arsenal of infallible proof-texts, is a collection of ancient religious writings which are accurate in some of their statements and inaccurate in others. In the effort to sift what is true from what is not true, a modern reader must (according to those who hold this second view of the Bible) employ the familiar test of historical

[1] See Fred J. Meldau—*The Miracle Man and the Wonder Book* (Bible Institute Colportage Asso., Chicago, 1923), pp. 7 and 8.

probability. Thus when he finds in the Old Testament the surprising statement that on a certain occasion the sun stood still,[2] he must ask what the historical probability is. Is it that the sun actually did stand still, or is it that at this point in the Old Testament an ancient Hebrew legend was incorporated into the narrative? When this method of Bible study is employed in connection with the gospels it leads to conclusions about Jesus which differ sharply from those quoted in the preceding paragraph. The new picture of Jesus which gradually takes shape might be termed "The Jesus of historical probability," and one of the professors at Columbia University gives this account of it.

"A simple Jewish teacher with a mystic sense of his own mission implores all men to dedicate their lives without reserve to the ideal of universal love, and by so doing gain eternal life. He further gives assurance that whoever wills to have this infinite boon (eternal life) may gain it regardless of earthly status, strength or learning—regardless even of past wickedness. Thus this man's teaching puts the most high glory within reach of the most lowly human being. To have discovered and proclaimed this way of absolute beauty, to have shown that it is free to all, to have lived gently and ardently, and then to have died terribly as a supreme exemplifi-

[2] See Joshua 10:12-14.

cation of the teaching—that is enough. For us today to try to better the picture by ornamenting the frame with such biological and psychological anomalies as a virgin birth or a miraculous absence of all ignorance and all sin, verges on the tawdry. Yet for Jesus' immediate successors such an effort was not only understandable but pardonable as well. Those men could see no better way of honoring their friend and celebrating the glory and the solace of his message than by following the well-worn path of mythological custom—first imputing to Jesus a monopoly of all wisdom and all virtue, and then loading down the record of his birth and life and death with physical signs and wonders." [3]

Here the Biblical statements which were accepted without question by the first author quoted in this chapter are subjected to the stern test of historical probability, and the extraordinary miracle-stories on which that first author laid such heavy stress are rejected as fragments of early Christian legend. From the portions of the gospel narrative which survive this process of analysis and evaluation this second author then constructs his new portrait of Jesus. It might fairly be called, as we have already suggested, "The Jesus of historical probability."

[3] See William P. Montague, *Belief Unbound* (Yale University Press, 1930), pp. 17 and 18.

The third of the current conceptions of Jesus is in essence an ingenious compromise between the first two. Like all compromises it contains certain inherent difficulties, but again like all compromises it appeals to the many individuals who prefer a middle-of-the-road position. This third conception of Jesus rests on the assumption that the gospel record is in the main thoroughly accurate, though some of the more bizarre portions of that record are quietly admitted to be "probably inaccurate as statements of actual historical fact." Thus (according to this third belief) Jesus was a divine or semi-divine being, though the story of his miraculous birth is perhaps legendary and the stories of the portents which accompanied his birth are almost certainly legendary. Thus many or even most of the miracles attributed to Jesus are said to have been actual events, though one or two of the more-incredible miracle-stories [4] are listed as "historically questionable." Thus the early theory that Jesus is the supernatural saviour of the human race is accepted as true, though the early belief that Jesus would return to the Earth during the lifetime of the generation then alive is passed by in silence. Thus Jesus' teaching about divorce is (according to *some* individuals who hold this third conception of Jesus) regarded as permanently binding on all Christians, though Jesus' teach-

[4] As, for example, the one recorded in Mt. 17:24-27.

ing about evil spirits is quietly dismissed as "part of Jesus' first-century inheritance." That this portrait of Jesus is inherently inconsistent and at points distinctly unconvincing is apparent to most of us. Yet this portrait has, today as in the past, wide popular appeal. As a matter of fact it is the portait which appears in many of the sermons, many of the Sunday School lessons, and many of the popular religious books current in American Protestant circles today. It might fairly be called, as we have already suggested, "The Jesus of compromise."

II

Which Jesus is the real Jesus? Which of these three different portraits is presumably the most accurate?

These are questions which each Protestant answers, and must of necessity answer, for himself. The particular answer which a given Protestant makes depends on a multitude of personal factors—the individual's type of mind, his early training, the experiences which gave rise to his own religious faith, and the extent of his acquaintance with the problems involved in drawing at this late date in history an accurate portrait of Jesus. The point of view of this book is that the second of the three interpretations of Jesus is presumably the most ac-

curate. This book assumes that Jesus was a human being in every sense of the term, that his work was that of a teacher of religion and ethics, that his beliefs and attitudes were (like those of all other human beings) largely conditioned by the beliefs and the social situations of his day, and that his major achievement was the clear formulation of a group of religious and ethical teachings which subsequently influenced uniquely the life of our western world. In short, this book regards Jesus as humanity's most significant teacher in the field of religion and ethics, and it proposes to analyze and evaluate his teachings in the same way in which the comparable teachings of any other great teacher might be analyzed and evaluated.

Suppose now Jesus is studied in this way. What were the major beliefs which he himself held, and which he tried to pass on to others? If we study his words carefully what do we find they actually say?

CHAPTER TWO

Jesus' Teachings about God and Man

I

At the outset of this analysis we should note two important facts. The first is that many questions about God which puzzle modern men most deeply, and on which they are most eager to gain light, are not even mentioned in the gospels. Whether this means that Jesus never faced these questions, or whether it means that he did face them but that his answers to them are not included in the gospel record, we cannot say. All we know is that in the existing accounts of Jesus' teaching these profoundly important problems are not discussed at all.

One of the points on which modern men greatly crave enlightenment is the matter of the actual existence of God. Is there really a God, or only an almost universal notion that a God exists? Subsequently (assuming that there is a God) modern men are eager to know whether He recognizes and supports our set of values, whether He loves and helps human beings, and whether His love and help reach beyond the race as a whole to each individual in particular. On these matters our generation greatly craves, and obviously needs, clear light. Unfor-

tunately the gospels do not give satisfying answers to our questions on these points, and do not explain why Jesus held on these subjects the opinions which he did. Thus we find, when we examine the gospels carefully, that Jesus accepted as true the conventional belief in the reality of God, but that he nowhere gives convincing arguments supporting the validity of that belief. On the matter of God's nature Jesus has relatively little to say, and the statements which he does make are not accompanied by the carefully-drawn arguments which modern thinkers demand. Jesus asserts that God recognizes and admires beauty, that He supports those causes which human beings feel are right, and that He loves not only the race as a whole but also every individual human being. But unfortunately Jesus does not go on and state *why* he holds these beliefs, or how he disposes of the vast amount of negative evidence which can be adduced against each of these theories. If we enter an even more speculative realm and inquire what the relationship is between God and Time, God and Space, or God and Matter, Jesus has literally nothing to tell us. When we seek answers to these questions we must seek them in places other than the gospels.

The second fact we must note is equally important. Jesus not only fails to answer some of the questions which our generation is most anxious to have answered,

but he offers to some other questions answers which—as far as most of us are concerned—now seem frankly mistaken. Consider the much-discussed problem of evil. How does it happen that a world designed and created by a loving God discloses such an extraordinary amount of undeserved suffering? Jesus' answer to that question was the simple one offered by practically all the thinkers in the ancient world. Jesus said (according to the gospel record) that the good things in life were the work of an unseen Good Being (God), while the bad things in life were the work of an unseen Evil Being (Satan). Thus Jesus ascribed to Satan or Satan's emissaries (the demons) the suffering and the disasters which he found everywhere about him. That this first-century solution of the problem of evil is not acceptable to thoughtful individuals today is obvious to us all. What would a group of intelligent Christians in our generation say if one of their number tried to explain epilepsy as Jesus explained it—on the theory of demon-possession? [1]

To recognize these omissions and mistakes in the teaching of Jesus is not to show disrespect to Jesus. Rather it is to face the facts honestly, and prepare ourselves to differentiate between the varied strata in Jesus' beliefs. What now were the things which Jesus said

[1] See Mark 9:14-29.

about God and Man? If we summarize his teachings as we might summarize those of any other great religious teacher what do we find?

II

Jesus' teachings about God and Man may be, and often have been, stated in minute and tiring detail. The salient points in those teachings can, however, be outlined in ten reasonably brief statements. By combining those statements we can reconstruct, with a fair degree of presumable accuracy, Jesus' picture of life. The main features of that picture seem to be these.

1. Jesus says there is a God who is present and active in our world, even though human beings never see Him. Jesus gives no proof of the existence of this unseen God, and he leaves many important questions about His nature undiscussed. But the belief in God's reality and in God's activity in our world underlies all of Jesus' teachings.
2. Jesus says that this God is almighty—that is, that He is in ultimate control of everything. What the exact relationship is between God's power and the power of human beings, and between God's power and the power of Satan and the demons, Jesus does not explain. He merely says that God is the final master of everything. This is the clear implication of the significant description of God

preserved in Mt. 11:25—"Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth." It is also the implication of the grim words in Lk. 12:4 and 5. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear. Fear Him who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell."

3. Jesus says that there are also present in our world unseen evil beings—Satan and the demons. These evil beings are continually fighting against God and seeking to inflict disasters on men. To Satan and the demons Jesus thus ascribes the tragic elements in human experience, and in their activity he finds a quick solution of the problem of evil. In Mk. 9:14-29 Jesus explains a sad case of epilepsy by the theory of demon-possession, and then attempts to cure the epileptic by exorcism. On hearing that his disciples have been successful in similar attempts at exorcism, Jesus cries exultantly, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven!" (Lk. 10:17-20). The implication of those words is plain. Jesus regarded Satan as the cause of these mental ailments, and believed that when the diseased individuals were cured by exorcism Satan's power was broken.

4. Jesus says that all human beings are God's children, and that as God's children they possess infinite value. Even though they may seem small and insignificant and helpless, and even though Satan and the demons may succeed in leading them into disaster or sin, they are still children of God and infinitely precious in His sight. This is the belief

which finds clear expression in the three great parables in Lk. 15:3-32, and in many shorter passages scattered through the gospels. See (for example) Mt. 18:10—"Despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father."

5. Jesus says that God loves every human being, and is always ready to begin helping every human being. Thus (according to Jesus) God's love embraces not only the human race as a whole but also each individual human being. This conviction finds classic expression in Mt. 7:7 and 8. "Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For *everyone* that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

6. Jesus says that the most important task which any individual faces is to meet fully the demands which God makes of him, and thus establish the right relationship with God. This seems to be the point of the parable preserved in Lk. 12:16-21, and also the point of the words recorded in Mt. 6:19-21. The idea also appears clearly in the familiar saying, "What shall a man be profited if he gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Mt. 16:26).

7. When asked to define the demands which God thus makes of men, Jesus says that they are the exercise of the familiar, practical virtues of everyday life —such virtues as generous judgment of others, willingness to forgive others, and eagerness to

help others. These ideas emerge repeatedly in the gospels, and form some of the most familiar and appealing parts of Jesus' teaching. Three passages which express these ideas with special clarity are Mt. 25:31-46 (the picture of the Last Judgment), Lk. 10:25-37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan), and Mt. 18:21-35 (the parable of the Unforgiving Servant).

8. But Jesus goes on to say explicitly that many (perhaps most) human beings will fail to meet these divine demands, and therefore will be condemned by God at the Last Judgment. This part of Jesus' teaching is frankly repugnant to many Christians today, and they usually pass it by in silence. But the gospels show clearly that Jesus believed in eternal punishment for the wicked, and furthermore that he believed this punishment would overtake a vast number of human beings—perhaps the majority of the race. These ideas appear unmistakably in Mt. 25:31-46, and also in the startling words preserved in Mt. 7:13 and 14. "Enter ye in by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. Narrow is the gate and straitened the way that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it."

9. While the majority of the human race thus moves toward ultimate doom, God surrounds the little company of the righteous (so Jesus claims) with detailed and unfailing care. In Lk. 10:1-12 Jesus assures his disciples that they need take no thought

for their future needs: God will invariably provide for each of those needs as it arises. In Lk. 12:6 and 7 Jesus carries this belief in God's detailed care of the righteous to extraordinary lengths. Even when we make allowances for his metaphorical way of speaking, the implications of his words are amazing. "Are not five sparrows sold for two pence? Yet not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God. Fear not: ye are of more value than many sparrows. The very hairs of your head are all numbered."

10. Thus (according to Jesus) the little company of the righteous should never be troubled by anxiety. Now, and in the world waiting beyond death and the Judgment Day, God can be counted upon to meet every need of the individuals who have met fully His demands. This is the underlying meaning of the extraordinarily beautiful passage in Mt. 6:25-34, the passage which begins "Be not anxious for your life, nor yet for your body." The splendor of these words is beyond dispute, yet we should always remember that for Jesus the words had implications which they do not have for most Christians today. Jesus restricted God's detailed and unfailing care to the little group which had fully met the divine demands, and Jesus also felt that this divine care involved complete provision for all the needs which would confront this group. On each of these points there has been a perceptible modification of belief in the long centuries since Jesus' day.

III

What now is the total picture of God and Man which thus takes shape as we analyze and summarize Jesus' beliefs? It is a picture which fittted naturally and easily into the thought-world of first-century Palestine. It is the picture of an unseen God who possesses ultimate control over everything in this world and the world-to-come, and whose attitude toward human beings is essentially kind. Arrayed against this friendly God are the demonic hosts, and under their vicious influence multitudes of human beings are pushed into disaster or snared into sin. God's demands on human beings are simple and reasonable, yet only a few individuals fully meet those demands. On this little company of the righteous God then lavishes a detailed and an unfailing care, while the remainder of the race (apparently the majority) moves toward divine condemnation at the Last Judgment and eternal punishment thereafter. This seems to have been Jesus' picture of God and Man and Destiny. That it differs from the comparable picture which many, perhaps most, Christians today draw is obvious to any thoughtful person.

In Jesus' teachings about God and Man we continually meet the phrase "The Kingdom of God." What

do those words really mean? What did Jesus think God's Kingdom was, and how did he think it would come? To a study of this next element in his teaching we now turn.

CHAPTER THREE

Jesus' Teachings about "The Kingdom of God"

I

In order to understand Jesus' teachings on this subject we must recall the set of beliefs about coming events which had gradually taken shape among the Jews during the centuries preceding Jesus' birth. Some seven hundred years before Jesus' time the prophet Micah had said that a day would come when Jerusalem would be the religious center of the entire world, when men from many races would accept the religious and ethical teachings of Judaism, and when the long-awaited era of permanent and universal peace would begin. This is the idyllic, non-miraculous picture of the future preserved in Micah 4:1-4. Apparently it dominated the thinking of many Jews, perhaps most Jews, before the disastrous days of the Exile.

When, during and after the Exile, a bewildering series of misfortunes overtook the Jewish people, this simple picture of the future gave place to one of a different type. Gradually the hope of a non-miraculous national triumph faded, and the expectation of a dramatic divine intervention took its place. How, except by direct action

on the part of God, could the tiny Jewish nation ever overthrow its conquerors and win the place of world leadership long promised to it? Thus when, in the decade between 170 and 160 B.C., the author of the Book of Daniel wrote the series of prophecies now preserved in Daniel 7 and 8, he presented an entirely new picture of the future. He said that God would presently send to Earth a divinely appointed emissary—the Messiah. By the exercise of the miraculous power entrusted to him by God, the Messiah would speedily overthrow the enemies of the Jews and inaugurate the long-awaited era of Jewish world-leadership and lasting world-peace. Furthermore (according to the author of the Book of Daniel) these startling events were to take place in the immediate future—within three and one-half years from the time at which the Book was written.

When these confident prophecies of imminent and miraculous national deliverance remained stubbornly unfulfilled, and when in the following century the Romans overran Palestine and subjected the Jews to an even harsher rule, the hopes of the coming divine intervention became even more ardent. At the time of Jesus' birth these hopes had flowered into a series of four beliefs which seem strange to us today but which did not seem strange to the Jews of the first century. According to popular Jewish thought in Jesus' day, the nations

which had oppressed the Jews for years were soon to be punished, and the prophet Elijah was to reappear (in reincarnated form) and gather in Palestine the Jews then scattered throughout the Mediterranean world. The long-awaited national deliverer (the Messiah) was subsequently to make his appearance, and then Jerusalem was to become at last (as Micah had prophesied seven centuries previously) the center of religious life and instruction for the entire world. These were the popular Jewish expectations at the time Jesus lived, and naturally enough Jesus shared them. It is in the light of these contemporary expectations that we must interpret Jesus' teachings about "The Kingdom of God." By that phrase Jesus meant, as his Jewish contemporaries meant, the new and miraculously inducted era of Jewish restoration and world-peace which (so Jesus and his contemporaries firmly believed) was about to begin.

II

Throughout the gospels we find indubitable references to the four popular beliefs just mentioned. Thus in Mt. 3:1-12 John the Baptist announces that "The Kingdom of Heaven" (apparently synonymous with "The Kingdom of God") is actually at hand, that "even now" the axe is laid at the root of the tree and startling changes are therefore imminent. In the same

passage we find a reference to the Messiah who (so John and his associates believed) was about to make his appearance. According to Mt. 4:17 Jesus began his public career as a religious teacher by repeating the announcement which John had just made—the announcement that the long-awaited Kingdom of God was finally at hand. On several occasions Jesus was asked whether he himself was the promised Messiah (Mt. 11:2-6), and at Caesarea Philippi (Mk. 8:27-30) the disciples made the interesting report that certain individuals were saying that Jesus was the long-awaited reincarnation of Elijah—therefore the *forerunner* of the Messiah. On this same occasion Peter went on to say that he himself believed that Jesus was not the forerunner of the Messiah but the Messiah himself. According to a brief but highly involved passage in Mk. 12:35-37, Jesus advanced the theory that when the Messiah finally appeared he would prove to be *not* of royal lineage. Whether this means that Jesus was trying to prove that he himself was the Messiah (even though he and his associates knew that he was of humble birth) is uncertain. Lk. 24:21 indicates that down to the very end of Jesus' career at least a few individuals clung to the belief that Jesus himself might prove to be the national deliverer whose coming had been so long and so eagerly awaited.

Many Christians today, realizing that these beliefs in an imminent and spectacular world-change proved mistaken, refuse to ascribe the beliefs to Jesus and insist on interpreting in other ways the passages in which these beliefs are stated. Thus some of these individuals claim that by the phrase, "The Kingdom of God," Jesus meant an inward, spiritual state into which those who adopt the right beliefs and follow the right courses of action gradually make their way. Thus others claim that by this phrase Jesus meant an ultimate social order in which all men will be governed by the combination of intelligence and kindness, a social order toward which the nations are still gradually moving. That these interpretations of Jesus' words are beautiful and inspiring is evident to us all: that these interpretations are historically accurate is unlikely. The probability is that just as Jesus shared contemporary beliefs in other fields so he shared them in the field of Jewish national aspiration and hope. That Jesus was a man of his own time is nothing against him. Unless all the probabilities had been altered how could the case have been different?

III

What now were Jesus' detailed beliefs about this swiftly approaching "Kingdom of God"? What was

the picture which rose in his mind as he spoke of that Kingdom? The following points seem fairly certain.

1. Jesus believed that the coming Kingdom would be established by divine power rather than by human effort. It would be God's gift rather than Man's achievement. This idea is implied in Lk. 12:32-40, and in the little parable preserved in Mk. 4:26-28. In this parable the farmer is not the one who produces the crop. Rather "the Earth beareth fruit *of herself,* he knoweth not how." Modern Christians rightly busy themselves trying to build a better social order, for the experience of the centuries proves conclusively that only through long and intelligent human effort can such a social order be established. But Jesus' thought moved on a different plane. Like the Jews with whom he lived, Jesus believed that God would "give" the coming Kingdom: human beings would not "establish" it. How could the almost helpless Jewish nation hope to initiate, by its own effort, a colossal world-change?
2. Jesus believed that the foreshadowings of the coming Kingdom were already evident, evident (in part at least) in the miracles which he and his disciples were performing. This conviction appears clearly in Mt. 11:2-6 and in Mt. 12:22-28. From these passages it is plain that many sick people were cured (or at least temporarily helped) by Jesus and his disciples, and that these cures were regarded by onlookers as miracles. That many of us today place a different interpretation on these

cures is irrelevant: the important point is that Jesus and the people about him regarded them as miracles, and in them saw signs of the advent of God's Kingdom. In Lk. 17:20 and 21 Jesus probably makes another reference to the foreshadowings of the vast and imminent world-change. He says that the precise moment at which the great event will take place cannot be stated in advance, but that in the widespread manifestations of the divine power already evident in Galilee the Kingdom is already present—in an incipient way, of course—among men.

3. Jesus believed that the complete advent of the Kingdom was imminent, so imminent that individuals alive at the time would witness it. On this point the gospels are extraordinarily precise, as the explicit words in Mt. 10:23, Mt. 24:34 and Mk. 9:1 show. Unless we read fanciful meanings into these statements it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Jesus believed his own generation would live to witness the end of the existing world-order.
4. Jesus believed that when God's Kingdom thus arrived it would come in sudden and spectacular fashion. This belief appears clearly in the long passage in Mt. 24:32-44, and also in the short passage in Lk. 17:23 and 24. Today most Christians believe that the new and better social order for which they work and pray will be achieved gradually, that the nations will "work their way slowly" into "the ideal social system." Jesus' thought moved on a different plane. He believed

that the end of the existing age would come "like lightning," and that the new age—planned by God and given from His hand—would begin in equally sudden and dramatic fashion.

5. Jesus believed that the advent of the Kingdom would bring great happiness and rich rewards to the little company of the righteous. On this point the statements in Mt. 19:27-29 are explicit. Probably the statements in Mt. 5:3-12 (The Beatitudes) are to be interpreted in the light of this same belief. When Jesus said "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth," he was probably not discussing the deep inward satisfactions which gradually come to those who show a humble spirit. He probably meant that when God finally brought the long-awaited Kingdom the righteous Jews, and the righteous Jewish nation, would receive the wealth and power and distinction promised them for centuries.

6. But Jesus also believed that the coming of the Kingdom would bring grim punishment to the great company of the wicked. That Jesus thus anticipated not only future happiness for the righteous but also future torment for the sinful is clearly evident from such passages as Mt. 25:41-46, Lk. 13:1-5 and Lk. 13:22-30. In Jesus' discussions of the precise events which would accompany this world-judgment we find many strange ideas—references to the dramatic reappearance (or perhaps the appearance) of the Messiah, a resurrection of the dead, and mysterious places of future reward and future torment. Whether Jesus himself ever

> worked all these ideas into a consistent and logical whole, and whether he could reconcile his belief in the eternal punishment of the wicked with his belief in God's love for all human beings, we do not know. All we can say is that all these ideas —some of them mutually contradictory—make their appearance in the existing gospel record.

These references to Jesus' beliefs about a future resurrection of the dead and future realms of eternal bliss and eternal suffering lead naturally to a discussion of Jesus' beliefs about life-after-death. What were his convictions on that subject? Were they the same as the convictions of thoughtful Christians today? To an analysis of Jesus' beliefs in this third field we now turn.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jesus' Teachings about Life-after-Death

I

HERE again it is necessary to examine the group of ideas which had gradually taken shape during the centuries before Jesus' birth if we are to understand the beliefs which Jesus himself held. Like most primitive people, the early Hebrews believed firmly in a spirit-world to which all human beings gain entrance at death. Probably the ultimate source of this belief was the experience of dreaming. When during sleep a man seemed to be in a distant spot, and when on waking it was obvious he could not have been there in physical form, a momentous conclusion was inevitable. The conclusion was that his "spirit" had left his sleeping body, had travelled swiftly to that far-away place, and had done there the things which his dream had disclosed. Once the idea of "spirits" thus gained entrance to the human mind, the development of an ever-expanding series of beliefs about the spirits of the living, the spirits of the dead, and the spirit-realm in which the latter dwell, followed inevitably. Several of the early beliefs on these subjects are preserved in the Old Testament. Thus

in I Samuel 28:3-25 we find a curious account of the way in which the spirit of the dead Samuel was summoned from the spirit-realm, and in Isaiah 14:4-19 and Job 3:11-19 we find descriptions of the supposed conditions of existence in that realm.

As the centuries passed, beliefs about the dead and the world of the dead grew steadily more elaborate. In Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 49:10-15 we find the conviction that God will eventually rescue the spirits of the righteous dead from their dreary existence in the spirit-realm, and give them the joy of permanent companionship with Himself. Similarly the belief in a resurrection of the dead finally made its appearance, and with it the belief that this resurrection would be followed by a world-judgment at which the righteous dead would be assigned to eternal joy in a realm of bliss, while the wicked dead would be assigned to eternal punishment in a realm of torment. In Isaiah 26:19 and in Daniel 12:2 and 3 we find statements of these later convictions. Thus it was into a complex thought-world that Jesus was born, and it was from such a thought-world that he (consciously or unconsciously) absorbed many of his ideas. What now were his ideas about the future existence awaiting human beings?

When we try to formulate a clear answer to that

question we encounter one unfortunate situation. At certain points in the gospel record Jesus' own beliefs about the life-after-death are obviously overlaid with the beliefs of some of the early Christians. To disentangle the two strands in the existing narrative, and to determine what Jesus himself believed (as contrasted with what some of his followers believed) proves extremely difficult if not impossible. Consider, for example, the familiar story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). Here we find vivid references to future torments, flames, and an impassable gulf which separates the realm of the righteous dead from the realm of the wicked dead. But did those words come from Jesus himself? Do they represent his own beliefs? At the end of the story we find clear evidence that the present form of the story comes from an early Christian preacher. Apparently he had been trying to convince a group of Jews that Jesus was actually the Messiah, only to discover that even his reference to Jesus' resurrection failed to prove his point. The final verse in the story (verse 31) reflects this controversy clearly, and leads us to suspect that the details of the present form of the story represent the speculations of an early Christian preacher, and therefore may *or may not* represent the beliefs of Jesus himself. Hence any attempt to use this

material, or similar fragments of material, in a discussion of Jesus' own beliefs about the life-after-death would seem a precarious undertaking.

II

The passages in the first three gospels in which Jesus' own beliefs about the future seem to be stated clearly are only five in number.

1. In Mk. 12:26 and 27 Jesus advances a somewhat involved argument defending the belief in personal immortality—that is, the belief in the survival of individuals as individuals. To modern Christians the argument is frankly unconvincing, for the doctrine of the verbal infallibility of the Old Testament on which the argument rests has now been generally abandoned. Jesus, however, accepted that doctrine, and on it built here a defense of the belief in individual survival. Expanded into clear form, Jesus' argument ran as follows. "When (according to Exodus 3:6) God spoke to Moses, God said: 'I *am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' The tense of the verb which God used is present rather than past: God says that He *is* the God of the three patriarchs. But at the time God made this statement the three patriarchs had been dead for many years. Since God always says what is true, and since He said to Moses (long after the three patriarchs

were dead) 'I *am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,' it must follow that the patriarchs were still in existence at that time. This means that they had survived death, and this in turn means that personal immortality is proved." Whether Jesus based his *entire* belief in survival on this verbal argument we do not know: it seems plain, however, that this strange argument was at least part of the foundation of his faith.

2. In Mark 12:18-25 Jesus is asked to discuss the nature of the life-after-death, and here he wisely refuses to become involved in a debate over details. His opponents (who evidently rejected the belief in individual survival) raised the question of the presumable status in the next life of a woman who had been married to seven successive husbands in this life. If there really is a future existence, and if she and all seven of her husbands actually enter it, whose wife will she then be? In reply to this semi-humorous question Jesus merely says that (according to his belief) the conditions of existence in the future world will be entirely different from those in this world. Such things as sexual characteristics and the institution of marriage will no longer exist. Here Jesus' teaching is obviously negative: he says certain things *will not* be present in the future world. Whether on other occasions (unhappily not reported in the existing gospel record) Jesus spoke positively and said what things *will* be present in that world, we do not know.

3. In Lk. 23:39-43 we find the record of an alleged conversation between Jesus and the two criminals who were crucified with him. We say "alleged" because the difficulty of securing any actual report of this particular conversation has long been recognized. According to the story, each of the criminals believed that Jesus was the Messiah—or at least hoped he might be the Messiah. The first criminal rebuked Jesus for failing to use the Messiah's supernatural power to bring deliverance to the three dying men. The second criminal appealed to Jesus for help when, as the Messiah, he finally brought the long-awaited Kingdom. To this second criminal Jesus is said to have made the reply, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Those eight words have given rise to numberless speculations. Did Jesus mean that he and this second criminal would enter Paradise immediately after they died? Does Jesus mean that this will be the experience of all human beings, or was this a special case? If this is to be the experience of all human beings, what happens to the traditional belief that there will be a resurrection of the dead and a world-judgment before anyone is granted admission to the realm of bliss? Jesus' words—assuming they are authentic—are extremely puzzling.
4. In Mt. 25:31-46 we find an extraordinarily vivid picture of a world-judgment connected in some way with the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of God's Kingdom. According to this passage it will be the Messiah (rather than God)

who will conduct the world-judgment, and who will make it include "all the nations." After this judgment the Messiah will welcome the righteous (presumably the righteous dead as well as the righteous living) to a realm of bliss "prepared from the foundation of the world." Similarly he will condemn the wicked to "the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels." How literally these words should be interpreted no one today can say. How they can be reconciled with the beliefs implied in other parts of the gospel narrative (Lk. 23:39-43, for example) no one knows.

5. In Lk. 23:46 stands the brief saying which, to many Christians today, is the most significant of all. "Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit! And having said this, he gave up the ghost." When death came, Jesus retained his lifelong trust in God's love, and yielded himself without fear into God's hands. He believed that just as he could rely on God's love and care in this world, so he could rely on them in that unknown world to which death was swiftly bringing him. It was in this brave faith that Jesus met the ultimate adventure, fearless and undismayed.

III

Such an analysis shows that the statements about the life-after-death which are preserved in the first three gospels are few in number and sadly confused in mean-

ing. From them it is impossible to gain any satisfying "picture" of the future world. It is this situation which has led Christians in every generation to turn eagerly to the fourth gospel, and study the statements about the life-after-death which are found there. Some of these statements—notably those in John 14:1-6, John 11:25 and 26, and John 5:24—have become widely familiar and have brought great comfort to bereaved individuals. In fact these statements are so widely known and so extremely helpful that it is of them that the average Christian today instinctively thinks when the question of Jesus' beliefs about life-after-death is raised. That these statements in the fourth gospel are beautiful and consoling is obvious: that they come from Jesus himself is highly improbable. What evidence we can secure at this late date indicates that these statements were made by a Christian leader who lived at least two generations after Jesus' death, and who was expressing in these words his own convictions about the future world. If we wish to learn what Jesus himself thought about that world, we must turn from the impressive and comforting words of the fourth gospel to the confused and confusing statements found in the earlier records of Jesus' life and teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jesus' Ethical Teachings

I

WHEN we attempt to analyze Jesus' teachings about right and wrong we shall do well to recall four significant facts. The first is this. Jesus' ethical teachings reflect clearly the social conditions prevalent in Palestine during Jesus' lifetime. In the society which Jesus knew it was difficult if not impossible to accumulate a large amount of wealth by thoroughly honest means: this situation does much to explain Jesus' evident hostility toward the rich, and his firm conviction that well-to-do individuals find it hard if not actually impossible to gain entrance to God's Kingdom. Similarly in the society which Jesus knew there was no such thing as well-organized and effective poor-relief: we must recall this situation when we find Jesus recommending indiscriminate charity as a solution of the problem of poverty. A second fact we must bear in mind is this. Jesus' ethical teachings were undoubtedly affected—to some degree at least—by his firm conviction that the existing world-order was about to end. Had Jesus realized that the existing world-order would continue indefinitely, it is at least conceiv-

able that he would have advised the rich young ruler to keep his property and administer it wisely rather than sell it and distribute the proceeds among his needy neighbors. A third fact of equal importance is this. Jesus' ethical teachings deal *mainly* with the duties of individuals rather than the duties of social groups. We search the gospels in vain to find any *direct* statements about the ethical obligations of nations, communities, or even families. Jesus seems to have been concerned chiefly with individuals, and the problems of group-morality which so greatly perplex our modern world seem to have lain outside the circle of his thought. The final fact we mention is perhaps the most significant of all. Jesus' ethical teachings deal with the simpler ethical problems. Only occasionally do we find Jesus facing the complex issues of right and wrong which arise when duties conflict, or when an individual must make a choice between two courses of action each of which seems wrong. This point is so important that we must elaborate it briefly.

Anyone who analyzes ethical problems soon discovers that they fall into three distinct groups. The first includes those problems in which a choice must be made between an act generally regarded as right and an act generally regarded as wrong. It is a simple ethical issue of this type which a man faces when he

chooses (for example) between remaining honest and starting to steal. In this situation the ethical problem is simple, and the man's difficulty usually lies in rallying enough will-power to do what he knows is right rather than in determining what the right course of action really is. The second group of ethical problems includes those in which the individual must make a choice between two courses of action each of which seems to him wrong. Such ethical issues are, quite obviously, more complex than those in which a right-versus-wrong alternative is presented. It is—to suggest a concrete example—an ethical problem of this second type which a pacifist faces when he must choose between going to war, and deliberately disobeying the orders of the government which has just drafted him for front-line service. Each of the two courses of action seems wrong, and yet—being a pacifist—he must choose between them. The third group of ethical problems includes those in which a choice must be made between two courses of action each of which seems right. This third ethical alternative—right-versus-right—is perhaps the most puzzling of all, because here one of the two conflicting duties must be deliberately left undone. It is an ethical issue of this type which (for example) confronts a college student when he must choose between leaving college to stay with his recently-widowed mother, and

remaining in college and completing his education. Each course of action is right, and yet the student must deliberately select one and in so doing ignore the other. These are the three different forms which ethical issues assume.

As we said a moment ago, Jesus' ethical teachings deal mainly with the simpler ethical problems—that is, the problems in which the alternative is right-versus-wrong rather than wrong-versus-wrong or right-versus-right. Jesus tells us (for example) that we should be generous rather than selfish, and that we should forgive other people rather than harbor grudges against them. The ethical problems which puzzle most people today usually prove, however, to be ethical problems of the more complex types—that is, problems in which a choice must be made between two courses of action each of which seems to be wrong, or in which a choice must be made between two courses of action each of which seems to be right. When individuals today are confronted with these more-complex ethical issues, little help can be found by reading and rereading the gospels. Frankly, the gospels seldom discuss ethical problems of the second and third types. To recognize this fact is not to show disrespect to Jesus, and it certainly is not to criticize him. It is merely to recognize the limitations of his teaching, as that teaching is reported in

the first three gospels, and to prepare ourselves to look in other places for the enlightenment which we need and which we, as Christians, believe that God is ready and willing to give.

II

What now were the major ethical principles laid down by Jesus? What was his picture of the "good" life?

It is clear that Jesus accepted the basic moral teachings which had been developed by the ethical teachers of earlier generations, and which had been recorded in the finer passages of the Old Testament. This seems to be the meaning of Jesus' significant statement, "Think not that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfil" (Mt. 5:17). Here also lies at least part of the significance of the great passage in Lk. 10:25-28. When someone asked Jesus to state the requirements for attaining eternal life, Jesus repeated the familiar commands given in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Obviously Jesus accepted the finer ethical teachings of the Jewish past.

But above this "old morality" Jesus proposed to build a "new morality." It was to this new morality that he referred in Mt. 5:20—"Except your righteousness *exceed* the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven." The Scribes and Pharisees (of the better type, of course) were the finest examples of the old morality, and yet Jesus said explicitly that to their many virtues certain new virtues must be added. It is these new virtues which form the subject-matter of Jesus' most significant ethical teachings, and which disclose most clearly his conception of the good life. What now were these new virtues?

III

An analysis of the gospel record indicates that the new virtues required by Jesus' new or higher morality were seven in number.

1. Jesus' higher morality begins by demanding in the individual a new attitude of humility or teachableness. It is to this character-quality that Jesus refers in the familiar parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18:9-14). The Publican possessed this quality of character: the Pharisee lacked it. It is probably this same quality which Jesus had in mind when he said, "Except ye become as little

children, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (Mt. 18:1-4). A child's modest estimate of his own abilities, his willingness to listen to others and learn from others—these are traits which Jesus demands in all those who aspire to his higher level of life.

2. Jesus' higher morality also demands in the individual right inward attitudes as well as right outward acts. According to Jesus, it is not enough if a man's *actions* are blameless: in addition his thoughts, his feelings, his desires must be above reproach. In thus moving from outward acts to inward attitudes Jesus showed himself one of the most discerning ethical teachers of the ancient world. He realized that only when the inner life of the individual had been made utterly "pure" could the outward conduct of the individual remain permanently unsullied. The passages in which Jesus speaks more clearly on this important point (Mt. 5:21 and 22, 27 and 28, 33-37, 38-42, and 43-48) are some of the finest in all ethical literature.

3. Jesus' higher morality also requires in the individual a complete sincerity—an absence of all cant, all pretense, all deceit. This is the quality of character to which Jesus refers in Mt. 6:1—"Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them." After stating this general ethical principle, Jesus gives three concrete examples of the character-quality which he recommends. The first is connected with the making of charitable gifts (Mt. 6:2-4), the second with the per-

formance of acts of public religious worship (Mt. 6:5 and 6), and the third with the performance of acts of private religious devotion (Mt. 6:16-18).

4. Jesus' higher morality then centers the daily moral life of the individual around such familiar and practical virtues as kindness, forgiveness, and generous judgment of other people. In Mt. 6:14 and 15 Jesus says that human beings cannot expect forgiveness from God unless they are willing to show a forgiving spirit toward each other. In Mt. 23:23 and 24 Jesus denounces the individuals who observe meticulously the minor religious rules but overlook "justice and mercy and faith." Significantly enough, Jesus terms the latter "the weightier matters." In the picture of the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46) Jesus insists that the ultimate destiny of each individual will be determined by the amount of everyday kindness and helpfulness which he has shown to the needy individuals about him. The beneficial effect of these words (particularly Mt. 25:40) since Jesus' day has been incalculable.

5. In discussing these practical, everyday virtues Jesus goes on to say that they must be extended to every human being, irrespective of his race or creed or social position. In other words, there must be no barrier to our kindness or our forgiveness. The familiar story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) was apparently deliberately designed to emphasize this point. The Good Samaritan's virtue lay not merely in the fact that he showed practical

kindness to an individual in great need, but also in the fact that when he showed this kindness he deliberately ignored racial and religious barriers. The implication of the story is that the wounded man whom he helped was a *Jewish* traveller on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho, and the antipathy between Samaritans and Jews had long been intense.

6. Thus Jesus' higher morality eventuates in an entirely new definition of greatness. Jesus insists that a man's greatness is measured by the amount of service which he renders to other people. The words of Mk. 10:35-45, culminating in the great saying "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister, and whosoever would be first among you shall be servant of all," constitute a landmark in ethical thinking. Whether Jesus was the first person in point of time to perceive that a man's greatness is measured by the amount he does for other people, cannot of course now be determined. But it is certain that Jesus was the first ethical teacher to bring this profoundly-significant truth to clear and influential expression in our western world.

7. To attain this higher morality, this new and nobler type of character, a man must (Jesus says) be ready to sacrifice anything and everything he possesses. Repeatedly this demand for willingness to renounce one's all is heard in the gospels. We find it in Lk. 9:59-62, and again in Lk. 14:25-33. It appears in the two little parables in Mt. 13:44-46, though its presence there is somewhat ob-

scured by the phrase "The Kingdom of Heaven is like" which has been mistakenly prefixed to each parable. Perhaps the most vivid expression of this demand for willingness to renounce everything in order to gain the new and nobler type of character, is found in the extraordinary passage which begins at Mk. 8:34 and continues through Mk. 9:1. Here we see Jesus' confident expectation that a vast world-change was imminent, his eagerness to rouse men to attain the new and higher morality described in his teaching, and his frank recognition of the fact that such an attainment might well involve the most extreme forms of self-discipline and self-sacrifice. Perhaps no other passage in the entire gospel record gives us as clear a glimpse of the complex group of ideas and ideals which filled Jesus' mind.

IV

All this makes plain Jesus' basic convictions about right and wrong. What actions did Jesus count right? Those which were in accord with the finer moral teachings of the past, and also in accord with the demands of the new and higher morality which Jesus himself was proclaiming. What actions did Jesus count wrong? Those which violated the spirit of either the old teaching or the new. That some of Jesus' more-detailed defi-

nitions of right acts and wrong acts were affected by the contemporary social situations which we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is not surprising. Neither is it surprising that his ethical teachings do not cover all the problems of right and wrong which in subsequent years have emerged to perplex human minds. In this area of his teaching, as in all other areas, Jesus was a man of his own country and his own time-period. The significant fact is that through these ethical teachings, limited though they are at certain points, Jesus made an incomparably valuable contribution to human life. Since the day when he began to describe his higher morality and urge men to attain it, our world has been a nobler and a kinder place in which to live.

Though Jesus' ethical teachings were, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, concerned mainly with individuals and the duties of individuals, Jesus himself was speedily and inevitably brought in contact with the social problems of his own day. Some of those problems related to local and temporary issues, and Jesus' attitude toward such problems need not detain us here. But some of the social problems which Jesus encountered in first-century Palestine were problems which emerge century after century in human society, and which perplex every generation of human beings. What attitude did Jesus take toward these permanent

and universal social problems? Are the solutions which he proposed for them solutions which approve themselves to reflective minds today? To a consideration of these questions we now turn.

CHAPTER SIX

Jesus and the Social Problems of His Own Day

I

BEFORE we attempt to analyze Jesus' teachings in this field we should recall four highly significant facts. The first is this. There are many social problems of genuine importance which did not emerge at all in Jesus' world, and on which Jesus' sayings give us therefore no light whatever. It is obvious, for example, that such a problem as that of determining proper hours and wages for factory employees was utterly unknown to the men of Jesus' generation. When we encounter such problems today (and modern Christians inevitably encounter them) we cannot find a solution for them by studying the gospel record. If we seek a solution for such problems we should save ourselves time and effort by looking elsewhere immediately. A second important fact we must remember is this. To some of the social problems which did emerge in Jesus' world Jesus offered no solution whatever. When, on the two occasions mentioned in Mk. 12:13-17 and Mk. 15:2, an attempt was made to force Jesus to commit himself on two of the "burning social questions" of the day, Jesus answered his questioners

in a way which seems to many of us somewhat evasive. Whether his action sprang from the conviction that the existing world-order was about to end, or from the feeling that his teaching applied mainly to problems of a different type, or from a natural desire to avoid the controversies in question, we cannot say. All we know is that on these two occasions he did *not* say frankly (according to existing records) whether patriotic Jews should pay taxes to the Roman authorities, and whether he was "the King of the Jews" (that is, the Messiah).

Still a third significant fact is this. When Jesus did express an opinion on contemporary social problems, that opinion was often colored by contemporary social conditions. We have already called attention to this fact in discussing Jesus' evident hostility toward the rich, and Jesus' evident faith in indiscriminate charity as a means for solving the problem of poverty. To lift Jesus' opinions out of their historical setting, carry them across the centuries and the continents, and then insist that they should be the opinions of all true Christians in all lands today, is to show a strange ignorance of the factors which conditioned—to a certain extent at least —Jesus' thinking. The final fact we must recall when we study Jesus' statements about the social problems of his own day is this. In at least some parts of the gospel

record Jesus' own opinions are overlaid with the opinions of some of his later followers. We shall find a striking example of this situation when, later in this chapter, we examine the statements relating to divorce which are attributed to Jesus. Before we hail any verse in the gospels as "Jesus' solution of a social problem," we shall do well to inquire whether the solution found there comes from Jesus himself, or from the man who compiled the gospel in which the solution is recorded, or from still a third individual whose ideas had been passed on to the compiler and had then been mistakenly attributed by him to Jesus.

Why is it important for Christians today to recall these somewhat disconcerting facts? Because such an action will protect modern Christians from the dangers into which earlier Christians fell—the danger of assuming that a solution to every social problem can be found in the gospels if the gospels are examined carefully enough, the danger of assuming that the solutions recorded in the gospels are necessarily solutions advanced by Jesus himself, and the danger of assuming that these solutions are solutions which can be employed successfully in other time-periods and in other social environments. What difficulties the Christians of the past would have avoided if they had thought ac-

curately on these points! What difficulties the Christians of today will avoid if they use a requisite amount of discrimination in these matters!

II

What now are the portions of the gospel record which indicate with reasonable clarity the attitudes which Jesus took when he encountered the more-important social issues of his day? Rather than discuss these passages one by one we shall group them into five clearly-related divisions, and then discuss those divisions in order.

1. Jesus and the rich

A few of the passages in the gospels indicate that Jesus made friends with the rich, and accepted gladly the help which they were able to offer him. In these passages there is no suggestion that Jesus criticized these individuals because they were well-to-do. The story of Zacchaeus in Lk. 19:1-10, and the reference to the "ministering women" in Lk. 8:1-3, are often quoted in this connection. The parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30) would seem to imply that the acquisition of wealth is (in some instances, at least) a thoroughly commendable thing. From the little story in Lk. 12:13-21 we may apparently infer that Jesus regarded the spirit of covetousness rather than the mere possession of riches as the danger of the well-to-do. If we

limit our attention to these passages we may well conclude that Jesus was friendly to the rich, and that he saw little or no reason for condemning them simply because they were rich.

But other passages in the gospels tell a different story. In Mt. 6:24 Jesus says that an individual cannot serve both God and "Mammon," and states flatly that a choice must be made between the two. In Lk. 6:20-26 Jesus pronounces blessings on the poor and woes on the rich, and in Mk. 10:23-27 he states that only by a special act on the part of God can a rich man gain entrance to God's Kingdom. Without that divine favor, the rich man's difficulties will be comparable to those of a camel trying to crawl through the eye of a needle. The basis of the hostility which Jesus here shows toward the rich seems to have been (as we have already suggested) the fact that in the society which Jesus knew it was difficult if not impossible to accumulate any large amount of wealth by thoroughly honest means. In this connection the distressing picture of the rich man preserved in Lk. 16:19-31 is significant.

How can we reconcile these two sets of passages? Was Jesus friendly to the rich or hostile? At this late date in history the question is hard to answer. Most of the evidence provided by the gospel record would seem to imply that he was hostile.

2. *Jesus and the poor*

Jesus' interest in the poor of his day and his eagerness to relieve their desperate need are evident at

many points in the gospel record. Apparently Jesus' theory of the way by which the need of the poor could best be relieved was to persuade the well-to-do to share in practically indiscriminate fashion with the poverty-stricken individuals all about them. This was of course the only method of poor-relief known in the small, rural communities of the ancient world, and it was the method of poor-relief which had been recommended for centuries by the religious and ethical teachers who had preceded Jesus. In Mt. 5:42 Jesus says to his followers, "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow turn not thou away." In Mk. 10:17-22 Jesus urges a well-to-do young man to sell all his property and distribute the proceeds among the poor. For this act of indiscriminate charity Jesus promises the young man "treasure in heaven." The picture of ideal individuals preserved in Mt. 25:31-46 is the picture of men and women who had practised this free and generous sharing with their needy neighbors.

Is Jesus' solution of the problem of poor-relief the one recommended by well-informed and discriminating individuals in the modern world? Merely to state the question is to answer it. Today our major attack on preventable poverty is made from angles utterly unknown in the rural Palestinian communities of the first century.

3. *Jesus and the problem of divorce*

In the familiar passage in Mk. 10:2-12 Jesus takes the position that the marriage-relationship is a

permanent and an indissoluble thing, and that divorce (accompanied by the privilege of remarriage) is never permissible. The clear implication of this passage is that two individuals who find themselves unhappily married may separate, but that neither should marry again while the original mate is living. Here, quite obviously, Jesus draws no distinctions between the rights of an innocent party and a guilty one: both parties are denied the privilege of divorce plus remarriage. The theory seems to be that under no circumstances may an individual whose partner by marriage is still living marry again.

This position (frankly an extreme one) soon proved unacceptable to the early Christians. It proved unacceptable because it failed to distinguish between the rights of innocent individuals and the rights of guilty ones. By the time the Gospel of Matthew was written (C. 80 A.D.) Jesus' original position had been deliberately softened by at least some Christian leaders. In Mt. 19:3-9 (the parallel version of the earlier account in Mk. 10:2-12) Jesus is represented as saying that the *innocent* party in a separation following an act of sexual infidelity has the privilege of divorce plus remarriage. This was, apparently, the position to which these early Christian leaders had been driven as they met the bewildering problems growing out of unsuccessful marriages. Here, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, Jesus' own teaching has been overlaid with the teaching of some of his later followers.

Is Jesus' absolute position the right one? On that point Christians have never been able to agree. The majority opinion in many Protestant circles today seems to be that Jesus' attitude was far too strict, and that there are situations in which divorce (accompanied by the privilege of remarriage) is not only permissible but commendable.

4. Jesus and racial conflicts

Needless to say, the forms in which Jesus met the problem of racial contact and conflict were different from the forms in which many if not most of us meet that problem today. In Jesus' day there seems to have been bitter hostility between the Jews and two other racial groups—incidentally both of them of the same color as the Jews. The Jews were hostile to the Samaritans (and probably also to the Syro-Phoenicians) because of religious differences: they were hostile to the Romans because of political and financial grievances. The so-called "color issue" did not enter into the situation. Some passages in the gospels would seem to indicate that Jesus shared the conventional Jewish feeling of hostility toward these Gentile groups. The words in Mt. 6:7, Mt. 10:5 and 6, and Mt. 15:21-28 seem to be tinged with condescension toward Gentiles, to say the least. Certainly the epithet which Jesus applied to the Canaanitish woman in Mt. 15:26 was distinctly harsh and unfriendly.

Yet there are in the gospels other passages in which Jesus shows the broad and kindly spirit

which is conventionally attributed to him. Thus in Mt. 9:10-13 we find Jesus associating freely with "publicans and sinners," many of whom were certainly of Gentile or mixed blood. In Mt. 8:11 and 12 Jesus pictures God's Kingdom as a society to which "many shall come from the East and from the West," and in which these aliens will take places beside the Jewish patriarchs. In Lk. 10:25-37 Jesus tells his matchless story of a kindness which deliberately overlooked racial and religious barriers, and significantly enough makes the hero of the story a Samaritan.

How do we explain the apparent contradiction between the temper of these two sets of passages? Perhaps we here see Jesus making his own way out of the narrow attitude in which he had been born and bred, and beginning to show that more generous and friendly spirit which in later centuries became permanently associated with his name.

5. Jesus and the use of force for righteous ends

Everyone agrees it is wrong to use force for unrighteous ends: is it right to use force for righteous ends? On this point there have always been sharp differences of opinion among Christians, and unfortunately the gospel passages bearing on this point are so confused and contradictory that these differences of opinion have been accentuated rather than softened by them. In Mt. 5:38-48 Jesus seems to be a complete non-resistant, and seems to say that the use of force—even for righteous ends—is never justified. Similarly in Mt. 26:51

and 52 Jesus tells one of his impulsive followers to sheathe his sword, and declares that the use of force is always self-defeating. Yet in Lk. 22:35-38 Jesus tells one of his followers to go and buy a sword—presumably with the intention of using it. Again (in Mk. 11:15-18) we find Jesus himself "casting out" those who were, according to Jesus' belief, profaning the Temple. Whether this work was done without the use of physical force no one today can, of course, say with assurance. It is significant however that the author of the Gospel of John (who was probably writing early in the second century) was convinced that physical force was employed (See John 2:13-17).

How these contradictions in the gospel record can be reconciled, or whether it is possible to reconcile them, it is difficult to say. The one certainty in the confused situation is that Jesus never faced the problem of the large-scale use of indiscriminate violence which modern warfare inevitably raises.

III

To what conclusions does such an analysis finally bring us? Three statements would seem to be warranted. First: the gospel record itself is incomplete and confused, and at certain points seems to be self-contradictory. This fact becomes plain when we examine the record of Jesus' religious teachings: it becomes even

plainer when we study the record of Jesus' words and actions as he faced the social problems of his own day. Second: at some points the early Christians evidently found it difficult to follow Jesus' teachings, and therefore they speedily began to modify those teachings. Even by the time the Gospel of Matthew was written (only half a century after Jesus' death) this process of revision and modification had begun. Whether the process was beneficial or not, Christians have never been able to agree: the one certainty is that the process began at that time and has continued steadily ever since. Third: any careful study of modern society speedily discloses the fact that scores of wholly new problems have now emerged to perplex the Christians of our time. Some of these new problems relate to religious belief: quite as many relate to personal and social ethics. As our generation strives to solve these new problems it cannot—unfortunately—turn to the gospel record for infallible counsel or even for general advice. In the gospel record these new and distinctively modern problems are not even glimpsed.

What now do these three facts in combination mean? They mean that life today is forcing on our generation of Christians the immensely difficult task of examining Jesus' teachings, locating within them the elements which are of primary significance and enduring value,

and then discovering the practical ways by which these more-important elements can be effectively utilized as our generation seeks to solve its religious and ethical problems. Up to this point this book has been concerned with the task of examining Jesus' teachings: in its remaining chapters it will attempt to locate within those teachings the more important elements, and then discuss the complex problem of utilizing those elements wisely and effectively in the effort to build a religious faith and a social order acceptable to the mind and the conscience of Christians today.

CHAPTER SEVEN

What It Means to Follow Jesus Today

I

SOME Christians are convinced that following Jesus today means following his teachings and his example literally. The individuals who take this point of view believe that all of Jesus' teachings are true in every detail, and feel that Jesus' way of meeting life's situations is ideal. Thus in their effort to follow Jesus these Christians (if they are thoroughly consistent) affirm the existence of Satan and the demons, claim that miracles may and often do take place, and confidently expect the existing world-order will end in the near future. For each of these beliefs these Christians can find ample warrant in the teaching of Jesus. Similarly these Christians (if they are thoroughly consistent) trust God to provide for any and all their needs, refuse to use force in their dealings with other people, and share freely with others whatever property they happen to possess. For each of these courses of action a warrant can be found in the practice of Jesus. To follow Jesus today means, according to this group, to follow him literally.

The difficulties into which such an endeavor rapidly

and inevitably leads have forced a second and a much larger group of Christians today to formulate a different definition of following Jesus. According to this second group, following Jesus means following him "resolutely," "daringly" or "heroically." It means "taking Jesus in earnest." In accordance with this definition any individual who professes a willingness to follow Jesus is urged to trust God more fully, share his wealth more generously, and attempt more bravely to "build God's Kingdom on Earth." He is told that there should be in his religion some such note of heroism as that which characterized the religion of the early martyrs, and he is warned vigorously against the perils of half-heartedness and incomplete consecration. A young New England minister who holds this point of view writes, "If we must choose between the Scylla of nauseating neutrality and the Charybdis of foolhardy futility, by all means let us choose the latter. To followers of Jesus we ought to say, 'When in doubt, be fools for Christ's sake!' Even if we are entirely mistaken in our judgments, the world needs a revelation of desperate earnestness on the part of churchmen. If we ministers could manage to be sued in court more often, or if we could be jailed once in a lifetime for our activities against the powers of exploitation and prejudice, then our sermons would burn their way into the hearts of

men. We need a few casualties at the right places to let humanity know that we mean business." [1]

With this appeal for a new spirit of earnestness among Christians all of us are certainly in sympathy. Yet the fatal weakness of any such definition of following Jesus is apparent to anyone who gives the matter careful consideration. When individuals are urged to "take Jesus in earnest," usually no mention is made of the fact that at certain points in his teaching (as his teaching is reported) Jesus *cannot* be taken in earnest—at least by well-informed, thoughtful and discriminating Christians. How can we (for example) take Jesus in earnest when he explains disease on the theory of demon possession, or when he recommends indiscriminate charity as a method for relieving poverty? On these points humanity has learned a great deal during the past nineteen centuries, and at these points intelligent Christians today inevitably break away from the words and the example of Jesus. Similarly when we are urged to be "fools for Christ's sake," when it is suggested that ministers might do well to get themselves jailed for their "activity against the powers of exploitation and prejudice," there is no mention of the fact that many of the problems confronting Christians today are bewilderingly complex, and that in this situation being a "wise

[1] See an article in "The Christian Century Pulpit," September, 1933.

master-builder" for Christ's sake is probably more helpful (everything considered) than being a "fool." Defining Christian discipleship as following Jesus "earnestly" or "heroically" overlooks—unfortunately—this necessity of exercising discrimination in both the realm of Christian belief and the realm of Christian action. For this reason this second definition of following Jesus has always proved unsatisfactory, and will probably always continue to prove so.

Thus the difficulties inherent in each of these two familiar definitions of following Jesus today have forced some of us to formulate a third definition. We are convinced that following Jesus means following him intelligently. It is for this third type of Christian discipleship—the intelligent following of Jesus—that this book pleads. What now does it mean to follow Jesus intelligently in the modern world?

II

In the teachings of every great religious leader three separate and fairly distinct strands are evident. The first is made up of the familiar and conventional ideas which the leader inherited from his predecessors or borrowed from his contemporaries. Some of these ideas

usually prove to be true and of permanent value, while others prove to be mistaken. In either case these inherited or borrowed ideas are the least important and least significant part of the leader's teaching. The second strand in his teaching is made up of the ideas which the leader himself developed but which in the course of time proved to be false. It is the task of dealing with this second strand in the leader's teaching which creates inevitable and sometimes serious difficulties for the leader's disciples in subsequent centuries. The third strand in the leader's teaching is made up of the ideas which the leader himself developed and which in the course of time proved to be true and of permanent significance. It is in this third group of ideas that the leader's real importance and real value lie. Conventional, mistaken, enduring elements—these are the three strands which can be located in the teachings of every great religious leader.

In the case of Jesus, the first two strands have been described and discussed many times in this volume. Repeatedly we have pointed out the fact that some of Jesus' religious beliefs and ethical ideals were drawn from earlier Jewish teachers, and repeatedly we have defined the points at which human thought has advanced since Jesus' time. What now is the third strand in Jesus' teaching? What are the elements in his

thought which form the true and the significant core of the religion he established?

III

In recent years many attempts have been made to answer that question. When scholars have attempted to discover what Jesus actually taught, there has been a surprising degree of agreement in their findings. It is these generally-accepted findings which have been restated in summarized and simplified form in the earlier chapters of this book. When, however, different individuals have taken these generally-accepted findings and attempted to locate within them *the significant and valuable elements,* there has proved to be a wide divergence of opinion. Some individuals have claimed that a certain group of ideas within Jesus' teaching is the important one, while other individuals have claimed that the major importance rests elsewhere. Liberal Protestants (or Modernists as they are popularly called) seem increasingly inclined to believe that the portions of the teachings of Jesus which have the greatest value for the modern world can be summed up in some such statements as these.

First: *Jesus claims that there is, at the heart of life, a God who loves all human beings so dearly that each of*

us can trust himself to that God during life and at death. Around that immensely significant conviction we Modernists find in the teaching of Jesus many subordinate ideas which are (according to our belief) of minor importance. Some of them were ideas which Jesus had inherited from his predecessors, others were ideas which he absorbed consciously or unconsciously from his contemporaries. Some of these subordinate ideas have proved to be true, while others have proved to be false. But in the midst of this complex mass of beliefs we find the great conviction stated above. It is the first of the important, the essential, the permanently significant teachings of Jesus.

Second: *Jesus claims that every human being, no matter how small or weak or helpless, is a child of God. As such he possesses infinite value, and he must therefore be treated with unfailing respect.* Here again this profoundly important idea was surrounded in the teaching of Jesus by many subordinate ideas of minor importance. Jesus pictured human beings as the victims of frequent demonic attack, he believed that the world-order in which they found themselves was soon to meet a sudden and spectacular end, and he claimed that in the life-after-death righteous individuals would be gathered into a realm of bliss while wicked individuals would be subjected to everlasting punishment. The

first and second of those subordinate ideas are now generally regarded as mistaken, and the third seems to be in a process of radical transformation. But at the core of this complex mass of teachings we find the profoundly significant conviction stated above. It is the second of the important, the distinctive teachings of Jesus.

Third: *Jesus claims that because every human being is a child of God and possesses infinite value, each of us must show active kindness to everyone he meets. Whether that other person belongs to our race, or shares our religious belief, makes no difference. Simply because he is a human being, a child of God, we must give him all the help we can. As we give that help, we ourselves achieve greatness; for true greatness is measured by the extent of the service which we render to other people.* Here again this basic conviction was surrounded in the teaching of Jesus by ideas which are now seen to be of secondary importance. Jesus felt, for example, that the best way to help needy individuals was to share freely with them one's possessions. Whether, in our world today, this way of giving help is the best and the most effective one seems open to question. But behind these matters of detail stands the great teaching summarized at the beginning of this paragraph. To describe fully the effect which this teaching has had on

human life and human institutions during the last nineteen centuries would be to rewrite the history of those years. Once Jesus had given the world this new picture of the individual's basic duty, this new definition of greatness, profound and far-reaching changes began to take place in human thought, human ideals, human conduct. What proved to be a new era in human history dawned. In this third part of Jesus' teaching we find the last of the essential, the significant, the permanently important elements in Jesus' religion.

IV

What now does it mean to follow Jesus intelligently? It means to lay aside—reverently but firmly—the transient elements in Jesus' teaching, to concentrate attention on these three essential and permanently significant elements, and then to find the ways by which these elements can be most effectively introduced into modern thought and modern life. What does it mean to spread Christianity? It means to spread these three important parts of the Christian teaching, to strengthen the ideals which inevitably grow out of them, and then to try to rebuild modern society in accordance with these ideas and ideals. This is what it means to follow Jesus today. This is what it means to spread the religion

which he established. To picture Christian discipleship in any other terms, to describe the Christian enterprise in any other way, is (so some of us believe) to invite slow but certain disaster. The generation now growing to maturity is, in the main, neither impressed by nor interested in attempts to follow Jesus literally, or in attempts to follow him heroically but without discrimination. If Christianity is to survive as an effective religious movement after the present group of older Christians has passed away, Christianity must be presented to the rising generation in some such new terms as those we have just outlined.

Once we gain this understanding of our present situation, we begin to see with arresting distinctness the problem now confronting Christian leaders everywhere. Can these leaders prove that Jesus was right when he said that God loves every individual, and when he said that every individual is of infinite value? These were (so liberal Protestants claim) Jesus' two basic beliefs. Are these beliefs true? Can they be proved true, or in the final analysis must those who accept them do so by an act of blind faith? Similarly, how can Jesus' followers today best put into practice his rule of kindness? That rule is (so liberal Protestants claim) the third and final element in true Christianity. In the concrete situations which modern life creates, what does

it mean to follow this rule? In a tangled social order like ours what is involved in being kind? To work out clear and convincing answers to these questions is the problem now confronting the Christian leaders of our generation. To a discussion of this problem we now turn.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Are Jesus' Two Basic Beliefs True? [1]

I

In the preceding chapter we defined the first of Jesus' two basic beliefs in the following way: "There is, at the heart of life, a God who loves all human beings so dearly that each of us can trust himself to that God during life and at death." The second of Jesus' two basic beliefs we defined as follows. "Every human being, no matter how small or weak or helpless, is a child of God. As such he possesses infinite value, and he must therefore be treated with unfailing respect." In popular and abbreviated terms these two beliefs are usually called "the belief in God's love of individuals" and "the belief in the infinite value of every human soul." On these two beliefs the structure of Jesus' teaching originally rested, and on these two beliefs the structure of Christian teaching has rested ever since. Now are these two beliefs true? Can they be proved true, or must those who accept them do so by an act of blind

[1] For fuller discussions of the problems raised in this chapter the reader is referred to two of my earlier books—*What Can We Believe?* (Macmillan 1933), and *Getting Help From Religion* (Macmillan 1936).

faith? This is the problem we shall discuss in this chapter.

II

As all thoughtful people now realize, there are two different types of proof and (corresponding to them) two different methods of proof. The first type of proof is the obvious and familiar one—proof by appeal to evidence gathered by the senses. The method of proof corresponding to this type of proof is of course to amass sense-evidence. How, for example, do I prove that my watch is lying on the table before me? How do I prove it is "really there," that I am not the victim of an illusion when I claim it is there? I prove the presence of the watch on the table by amassing the evidence given me by my senses, in this instance by three of my senses. I look at the watch, I touch the watch, I bend down and listen to the ticking of the watch. Then, by combining the bits of evidence brought me by my eyes, my fingertips and my ears, I announce that the presence of the watch on the table is proved. The watch is "really there": I am not the victim of an illusion when I claim it is there. If someone continues to have doubts about the presence of the watch on the table, I corroborate the evidence given me by my senses with similar evidence

given to other witnesses by their senses. This type of proof and this method of proof—by appeal to sense-evidence—is the one which is commonly used in everyday life, and its validity is seldom questioned by everyday people. For the ordinary individual, seeing—or hearing or touching or tasting or smelling—is believing.

But suppose I want to prove something less obvious and more complex—that someone deliberately put my watch together. How do I prove that? In this instance I cannot employ the first type of proof and the first method of proof, for the watch-maker (if there was one) is not here to be seen, touched and heard. In this case I must employ a second type of proof and a second method of proof—proof by appeal to a logical induction drawn from the evidence provided by the senses. As I examine the watch I find that its many parts have been fitted together with great precision. Furthermore, as I study the long record of human experience I discover that precise adjustment is never the work of blind (as distinguished from directed) force. Thus an aimless gust of wind often heaps dead leaves together into a pile, but it never arranges them in an ordered and ingenious pattern. If I find that the leaves have been arranged in an ordered and ingenious pattern, I can infer that something other than an aimless gust of wind acted upon them. Discovering now (and discovering on the

basis of what is ultimately sense-evidence) that my watch gives evidence of precise adjustment, and discovering too (and also on the basis of what is ultimately sense-evidence) that precise adjustment is always the work of directed rather than blind force, I announce that someone who understood watches and wanted to make my watch run put my watch together. I insist that the existence and the activity of a watch-maker have been proved, even though I have no direct sense-evidence of the watch-maker himself. He is not here to be seen or touched or heard, and yet I claim that he is "real." In this instance I have employed the second type of proof and the second method of proof—proof by appeal to a logical induction drawn from the evidence provided by the senses.

Obviously this second type of proof is less direct and less conclusive than the first. Obviously it is much more difficult to use this second method of proof correctly than it is to use the first. When the second method is employed, there is always the danger that a false induction may be drawn from the evidence: then the theory which is said to be proved will not be proved at all. Yet in spite of these difficulties and limitations, this second method of proof is continually employed by us all. It is employed because it is the only method we have of proving the more-complex conclusions we continually draw,

and need to draw, about ourselves, about other people, and about the strange and puzzling universe within which we find ourselves. It is this method of proof, for example, which is employed when we attempt to "prove" such a general principle as that of evolution. From a mass of evidence reported (in the final analysis) by the senses, we draw what seems a logical induction, and then by an appeal to that induction announce that the theory of evolution has been proved.

Why is it necessary to discuss types of proof and methods of proof when our concern is with religious beliefs such as those we set out to discuss in this chapter? Because, once we abandon the ancient practice of appealing to the words of a supposedly infallible Bible when we attempt to prove the validity of religious beliefs, we must find a new way of proving their validity. Much of the contemporary confusion in the Christian world is caused by the fact that, though the practice of appealing to proof-texts has today been widely abandoned, the new method of proof now employed in its place is not yet familiar to the average Christian.

III

How now does a modern Christian prove that there is a God? A Christian calls attention to three significant

facts about our universe, facts which are reported to us (directly or indirectly) by our senses. The first fact is that our universe discloses a dominant element of orderliness. The things which make up the universe seem to be arranged rather than merely piled together in helter-skelter fashion. The processes which go on within the universe seem to be orderly and consistent rather than erratic and unpredictable. It is, of course, this dominant element of orderliness which makes scientific study possible. If the universe were not an orderly place, no conclusions drawn in one area would have significance for any other area. Similarly no conclusions drawn today would have any value tomorrow.

The second fact to which a modern Christian calls attention is the fact that our universe discloses an extraordinary amount of adjustment and apparent purpose. Things are not merely arranged: they seem to be arranged with certain ends in view. Processes are not merely orderly and consistent: they seem to be fitted together in such a way that they will be consecutive and purposeful. The third fact to which a Christian calls attention is the fact that the strange thing which we call "intelligence" has finally emerged as one of the later products of the age-old evolutionary process. On an Earth which was originally lifeless we now find human beings who possess the ability to perceive, analyze, plan,

and then create in accordance with their plan. To this amazing ability, which made its appearance at a relatively late date in the evolutionary process, we usually give the name "intelligence." Where now did intelligence come from? Could it have emerged here if the universe and the evolutionary process had originated in something non-intelligent?

After calling attention to these three facts about our universe, a modern Christian states the induction which he draws from them and which he regards as strictly logical. It is that an unseen Mind-and-Power is at work here, an unseen Mind-and-Power responsible for the order, the adjustment and the emergent intelligence evident all about us. To this unseen Mind-and-Power a Christian gives the familiar name "God," and he regards the existence of God as proved. He grants that God's existence has not been proved by the first type of proof and the first method of proof—by appeal to sense-evidence. He admits that no one can see God, hear God or touch God. But he does claim that God's existence has been proved by the second type of proof and the second method of proof—by appeal to a logical induction drawn from evidence provided by the senses. It was this second type of proof and this second method of proof which were employed when the existence of the watch-maker was proved: it is this second type of proof

and this second method of proof which are employed when the existence of God is proved.

Thus a modern Christian cannot share the belief which many of his contemporaries now hold—the belief that we human beings find ourselves in an old and vast universe which *happened* to be put together in order, which *happened* to possess elements of adjustment and apparent purpose, and which *happened* to bring into existence an intelligence which is present nowhere else in the total scheme-of-things. A Christian is convinced that an unseen Mind-and-Power is present here with us —a Creative Intelligence which planned both the universe and the evolutionary process. "In the beginning, God . . ." There is the belief of a modern Christian, and it is a belief which—so he claims—rests on reason and proof rather than on either blind faith or wishful thinking.

IV

But what about God's love? Can a modern Christian, after proving that God is really here, go on and prove that God is friendly?

The Christians of the past based their belief in God's love largely if not wholly on the "revelation" made in a supposedly infallible Bible. They granted that the

existence of God could be demonstrated by argument: they claimed that the loving character of God could be proved only by referring to the "proof-texts" scattered here and there in the Old Testament and the New. Locating one of the shortest and most explicit of these texts in I John 4:8, they quoted to inquirers the three words "God is love," and then regarded the loving character of God as proved. When now modern Christians abandon the use of proof-texts (as a consequence of the fact that they have been forced to abandon belief in the infallibility of the Bible), have they any new way of proving that God is friendly rather than cruel?

The proof which a modern Christian employs is the proof which Jesus himself seems to have used centuries ago. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him!" (Mt. 7:11). Jesus' reasoning here is plain. From the love which Jesus found as a dominant element in human life at its best, Jesus inferred that love as a dominant element must be present in the Divine Being from whom human life originally came. To a modern Christian that argument still seems convincing, even though a modern Christian has an entirely new theory of the way by which God made human life emerge here. Finding that the

life-process which God originally set in motion has finally brought into existence men and women who at their best are dominated by kindness and helpfulness, a modern Christian claims that the Ultimate Author of that life-process must Himself possess the same fine character-qualities which are possessed by the best human beings whom the process has produced. To put the matter more simply, a Christian believes that God must be as good as human beings are at their best. Specifically this means that God must be wise rather than stupid, good rather than bad, loving rather than cruel.

But does God's love extend, as Jesus claimed, from the human race as a whole down to each individual human being? Is there even an atom of truth in the picture of God which Jesus drew in the three parables preserved in Lk. 15:3-32—the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son? Here God is pictured as profoundly concerned over the fate of the last and the least of His children: does that picture correspond in any degree with the actual facts? Before we consider that question let us turn to the second of Jesus' basic beliefs—the belief that every human being is of infinite value. If we find that this belief can be proved true, then we may find it somewhat easier to prove that God's love includes individuals as well as the race as a whole.

V

When we examine the many different forms of life brought into existence by the evolutionary process, we discover that human beings possess at least four powers not possessed (to a comparable degree at least) by any other living form. These powers are the capacity for sustained and abstract thought, the capacity for deliberate and purposeful action, the ability to recognize and appreciate beauty in some or all of its many forms, and the ability to draw accurate moral distinctions. At these four points even the most highly evolved of the animals stands far below Man. A finely bred dog, for example, may have the ability to think and then to act in accordance with a purpose, but how much greater the ability of the dog's master at these points! Whether a dog can draw moral distinctions seems open to question: that the dog's master can draw them no one doubts. The ability to recognize and appreciate beauty? No one attributes that power to the animals, even to the higher animals. The dog's master may be found gazing in wonder at a sunset: the dog is never seen doing that. It would seem as if the life-process, on reaching the human level, had succeeded in creating new powers and giving them to Man. It would seem as if subhuman evolution had reached a certain point, and then human evo-

lution had made its way from that point onward and upward.

Why now does a Christian believe that Jesus was right when he said that every human being possesses infinite value? Because a Christian realizes that every human being (every *normal* human being, of course) possesses these four unique powers. Every human being has the ability to think, the ability to create in accordance with a plan, the ability to perceive and appreciate beauty, and the ability to draw accurate moral distinctions. In some individuals, of course, these powers have not been adequately developed: in these cases the powers exist within the individual in rudimentary or even latent form. But there the powers are, and the fact that every normal individual possesses them places every normal individual on a level of existence and a level of value perceptibly higher than those of any other living form. Whether Jesus realized that this is *why* every human being possesses infinite value, we do not know. In any case, Jesus stated the fact that every human being does possess this value. We today restate the fact, and then go on to explain why it is the fact.

We are now in a position to consider the question raised in the preceding section of this chapter. Does God's love extend beyond the human race as a whole to each individual human being? If we claim that it does,

can we give a reason for our belief? Or must we, in the final analysis, base our belief on blind faith?

A modern Christian's answer to those questions will be evident if we restate the series of convictions which this long chapter has sought to establish. A Christian is convinced, and convinced by arguments which seem to him thoroughly logical, that a Being whom he calls "God" is actually present in our universe, even though our five senses fail to bring us any direct evidence of His presence here. A Christian is further convinced that this God is dominated by love—a love comparable to the love which appears in human hearts at their best. Asked to define or describe this God, a modern Christian calls Him "the Mind-and-Power-and-Goodness working in and through the life-process, and producing the ordered and purposeful universe within which we now find ourselves." A Christian is further convinced that human beings possess unique powers, that in spite of their all-too-obvious limitations human beings are still the most significant living forms which our world discloses. Is God interested in *individual* human beings? A modern Christian believes with Jesus that God is. Each individual human being possesses powers which lift him to a value-level higher than that of anything—living or non-living—in the subhuman realm. If God has any interests at all, it seems reasonable to infer that

they must be interests which cluster about the most significant products of His vast and age-old evolutionary process. Thus to a modern Christian Jesus' two basic beliefs seem utterly true, and on the foundation of those beliefs the modern Christian—like the man of long ago whose name he still bears—builds not only his convictions about God and Man and Destiny, but also his way of facing life and meeting its inevitable problems.

VI

But if all this is true, if there is a loving God who is concerned over every human being, how do we explain the pain and the tragedy which appear all about us? Jesus explained these darker elements in human experience by saying that Satan and his demons are present and continually active in our world. If we today abandon belief in these unseen powers of evil, are we not driven into a new dilemma? Must we not either drop Jesus' belief in a divine love which includes all individuals, or devise a new and convincing answer to the problem of evil? This *is* the dilemma into which the destruction of the age-old belief in evil spirits has now forced modern Christianity. Some modern Christians, unable to find a new and convincing explanation of the

evil in the world, have gradually abandoned Jesus' faith in God's love and reverted to a form of Stoicism. They realize that terrifying disasters often overtake innocent individuals, they cannot reconcile the advent of these disasters with the Christian theory that God is love, and therefore they abandon the Christian belief in God's love and brace themselves to endure with grim fortitude whatever hardships the years bring to them. But meantime other Christians cling resolutely to Jesus' faith in God's love, and try—consciously or unconsciously—to devise a new explanation of the evil present in our world. What now is the new theory which these modern Christians are advancing as they thus try to retain Jesus' belief that God loves individuals, while they admittedly abandon Jesus' explanation of pain and suffering?

The theory which some (not all) modern Christians advance runs as follows. God's purpose in creating our world and in initiating the evolutionary process which has finally brought the human race into existence, was to make possible the development of human personalities. Such a personality emerges in our world whenever a child is born: with the passage of the years this personality is disciplined and developed (if the situation is normal, of course) by the opportunities and responsibilities which life provides. This development of per-

sonality (so a modern Christian believes) will continue after death, and will continue in the case of *every* personality. Thus the definition of immortality which a modern Christian adopts is "the survival and continued development after death of every human personality." In this growth of personality—a growth which we see beginning here, which the Christian believes will be resumed after the brief interruption of death, and which he believes will continue forever, and continue for every personality—a modern Christian finds what seems to him God's purpose for the human race.

But if such a development of personality is to take place, the environment within which it takes place must be an environment of a particular type. It must be an environment with rigid and therefore predictable sequences, with inevitable social contacts, and with the power of free choice offered to every individual. Furthermore it must be an environment dominated by the principle that gains shall be made through slow and orderly advance rather than as the result of sudden and miraculous changes wrought by friendly outside powers. Only in such an environment can the steady development of human personality take place, and take place in orderly and intelligible fashion. Only when the processes of Nature are rigid and therefore predictable can Man understand them, forecast them, adjust to them,

and in the process of adjustment gain wisdom and skill. Only when Man is compelled to make social contacts, many of them, can he acquire such virtues as kindness and forbearance. Only when each individual is given the power of free choice can the development of the moral nature begin. Only when gains come through orderly evolution rather than from miraculous transformations can Man plan his advances, work for them, and finally achieve them through intelligent and deserving effort.

But, as all of us realize, an environment of this specialized and complex type is inevitably an environment which hides the possibility of disaster—disaster sometimes deserved and sometimes undeserved. The rigid natural processes which enable us to forecast the future are processes which, from the very nature of the case, create constant perils for us. The same law of gravitation which enables us to construct buildings which will hold together also carries to swift death a child who leans too far from a window. The same life-process which is continually bringing into existence new living forms which eventually become the glory of our gardens also brings into existence new germs which menace our existence. The inevitable social contacts which enable parents to learn kindness as they live with their children also bring on the parents cruel suffering,

perhaps wholly undeserved suffering, when the children go wrong. The gift of free-will brings with it the possibility of far-reaching disaster—brings it when some of the individuals to whom free-will has been given choose the easy wrong rather than the hard right, or risk a dangerous short-cut to happiness. The law of gain through slow and orderly advance rather than from sudden and miraculous transformation enables the human race to plan its gains and then achieve them, but also fills the world with individuals who represent the lower stages of mental and moral development, and who—as the criminal group—promptly create serious difficulties for their neighbors. When God resolved to create and develop human personalities, and when He brought into existence the type of environment which would make this development possible, the stage was set for both the triumphs and the tragedies which the subsequent centuries revealed. Disasters, deserved and undeserved, are thus the tragic incidents or accidents which are the inevitable accompaniment of a world and a life-process designed to make possible the development of human personalities. Such a world and such a life-process concealed both good potentialities and bad. In taking the first God was obliged to take the second as well.

Could God have devised a world and a life-process which would have developed human personalities as

they have been developed, but which would have done so at a smaller cost in suffering and pain? That question is unanswerable. The only thing we can say is that the present scheme-of-things has developed, and is still developing, human personalities to an extraordinary degree. When we compare a newborn child with a fully developed adult, we see what that development is on the scale of individual life. When we compare the caveman with the finest human beings we find in the world today, we see what that development has been on the scale of racial life. If we grant the possibility of immortality (and by immortality we mean the survival and endless growth of *every* human personality), and if we grant the possibility of indefinite existence for the human race here on Earth, we begin to realize what possibilities the future holds in store for both the individual and the race. Whether such gains as those which thus seem to be foreshadowed could have been registered under a scheme-of-things entirely different from the present one, a Christian willingly admits he does not know. But he hastens to add that the present scheme-of-things has, in spite of the vast amount of suffering which it has produced, already lifted both the individual and the race to extraordinary heights. And in the unending years to come—an endless future in which the Christian firmly believes—he is confident that this pres-

ent scheme-of-things will carry to completion, in the case of the race as a whole and also in the case of each individual human being, the significant growth-process which has been begun here on Earth.

CHAPTER NINE

The Problem of Applying Jesus' Rule of Kindness

(a) In the Case of Individuals

I

WHAT we have here called "Jesus' rule of kindness" is of course the expression in action of the third of Jesus' major teachings. In Chapter Seven we defined that teaching as the belief "that because every human being is a child of God and possesses infinite value, each of us must show active kindness to everyone he meets. Whether that other person belongs to our race, or shares our religious belief, makes no difference. Simply because he is a human being, a child of God, we must give him all the help we can. As we give that help, we ourselves achieve greatness; for true greatness is measured by the extent of the service which we render to other people." When this belief is put into action it results in the "rule of kindness" with which Jesus' name has always been associated. According to this rule, each one of us must always give kindly, helpful, generous treatment to every human being he meets. We must forget ourselves, think and plan and work for others, and

include within the range of our active good-will literally everyone—including the individuals who have previously mistreated us. In following this way of living we make ourselves (Jesus claims) sons and daughters of a Heavenly Father who shows this same kindly spirit by making His sun "rise on the evil and on the good," and making His rain "fall on the just and on the unjust." It is in this code of conduct that Jesus' three major teachings thus find their ultimate and their practical expression.

But is it a simple matter to follow Jesus' rule of kindness? If a man resolves to treat everyone he meets with active and unfailing good-will, will be encounter no problems and difficulties? Unfortunately he will encounter many of them. They are caused by a factor in life which is of the utmost importance but which, curiously enough, many people persistently overlook. It is the conflict of duties. Sometimes our duties are arranged in a neat and unbroken line like the rails which form a railroad track. In such situations it is easy enough to recognize our "line of duty," and when difficulties arise they usually prove to be difficulties connected with the acquisition of adequate moral strength rather than with the discovery of adequate moral wisdom. Sometimes, on the contrary, our duties lie like tangled Jack Straws, and in these situations the problem of determining our true

"line of duty" becomes extremely puzzling. We discover, for example, that in doing one duty we must leave another undone, that in assuming one set of obligations we must ignore another. It is the fact that our duties often collide in this strange fashion which makes the task of following Jesus' apparently simple rule of kindness a difficult matter. In this chapter we shall discuss three of the ways in which duties thus conflict, and then analyze the tangles which inevitably ensue.

II

To begin with, there are some situations in which our duty to a good person conflicts sharply with our duty to a bad person. Perhaps a concrete case will make the matter clear. In November, 1937, three convicted kidnappers succeeded in escaping from a prison in New York State. Two of them were speedily recaptured by the police, but the third found a safe hiding-place in the attendant's shack on a public parking-space in Syracuse. There he remained for a full day. Curiously enough he talked at length with the attendant about the escape of the three kidnappers, and finally asked the attendant frankly whether he (the attendant) would "let on to the police" if one of the criminals took refuge in his

shack. The attendant said he would not, but subsequently—when his suspicions had been thoroughly roused—he deliberately telephoned the authorities. Within a few minutes the third kidnapper was in custody again, and in due time was returned to prison for what will undoubtedly be a very long term. When the attendant realized that the escaped convict was hiding in his shack, what was his duty? Or to speak more accurately, what were his duties?

The attendant's duty to the kidnapper was of course to treat him with kindness. His duty to the policeman on the street corner was of course to treat *him* with kindness. Being kind to the kidnapper meant permitting him to remain hidden in the shack. Being kind to the policeman meant summoning the policeman to arrest the kidnapper. From the nature of the case, the attendant could not perform both duties: he had to choose one and deliberately ignore the other. Did he make the right choice between those conflicting duties when he summoned the policeman? Most people would say that he did. Most people feel that our duty to a good person (that is, a person representing a righteous cause) usually takes precedence over our duty to a bad person (that is, a person representing an evil cause). In accordance with this generally accepted belief, most people will—in an

emergency—cooperate with the authorities rather than give aid to criminals.[1]

In the case we have just quoted, it is fairly easy to resolve the tangle and determine in what way Jesus' rule of kindness should be applied. In other cases (and unhappily there are many of them) the problem proves far more puzzling. When, for example, the Governor of a State is asked to show kindness to a convict by giving him a pardon, what is the tangle of duties which immediately ensues? It is this. Should the Governor be kind to the convict and grant him the pardon, or should the Governor be kind to the Judge who originally sentenced the convict, and resolutely sustain the Judge's verdict? Here it is no simple matter to determine which duty should be placed first. Or suppose a Chinese resident of Shanghai resolved to follow Jesus' rule of kindness at the time when the Japanese attacked the city in 1937. What would this resolution mean in practice? Would it mean that the Chinaman would be kind to the Japanese soldier who was detailed to set fire to a Chinese factory, or would it mean that he would be kind to the Chinese general who was imploring all loyal Chinese to defend their city? In the first case being kind would mean letting the Japanese soldier destroy the factory, in the second it would mean heeding the Chinese gen-

[1] For a further discussion of this point see p. 113.

eral's plea and opposing the Japanese soldier in every possible way. Which of these two conflicting duties should take precedence? In that particular situation what would it mean to follow Jesus' rule of kindness?

III

A second form which the conflict of duties often assumes is this. On certain occasions our duty to one good person collides sharply with our duty to another good person, and on these occasions the problem of resolving the conflict—that is, determining to which person to show our kindness—often proves extremely puzzling. Curiously enough, the gospels preserve an incident which involves a duty-conflict of this type. In Lk. 9:59-60 we find the abbreviated account of the difficulties which arose when a certain man set out to follow Jesus, and then discovered that his father (who evidently lived at a distance) had died. This man's filial duty was of course to return home, arrange for his father's burial, and then remain at home after the funeral as long as he was needed there. But this same man's duty as a follower of Jesus was to remain with Jesus and fulfill the obligations which he had assumed in joining Jesus' company. In doing the first duty this man would, of course, be compelled to sacrifice the second. Or in choosing the

second duty he would, obviously, be compelled to ignore the first. Which duty should he place first? Should he be kind to his widowed mother, or kind to Jesus? According to Lk. 9:60 Jesus said that the man's filial duty should be subordinated to his other duty. Whether the famous words "Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of God" are an accurate account of Jesus' advice in this tangled situation, we cannot of course say. If they are an accurate account, Jesus' solution of this problem is—frankly—not the solution which most Christians today would suggest.

This second tangle of duties, like the one we discussed in the preceding section of this chapter, sometimes becomes hopelessly complex. When a young man must choose between being kind to a sensitive mother and being kind to an equally sensitive wife, to which woman should he show his kindness? Or here is a banker who holds a mortgage on a certain piece of property. For years he has given to a certain local charity the money paid him annually as interest on this mortgage. One day the man who occupies the property reports that he has suffered serious business reverses, that his wife and his children are ill, and that he cannot pay the interest due on the mortgage that year without immense personal sacrifice. Will the banker not be kind enough

to cancel the interest-charge for one year? But that very day the head of the charity makes his appearance and requests the banker to give his usual contribution to the charity promptly and in full. An emergency has arisen which makes it essential that all the friends of the charity "rally promptly and generously to its support." In this concrete situation what does it mean to follow Jesus' rule of kindness? Should the banker be kind to his tenant, cancel the interest-charge, and inform the representative of the charity that the charity will receive no gift that year? Or should the banker be kind to the representative of the charity, and inform the hard-pressed tenant that he must meet his usual obligation in full and on time? These are not captious questions or imaginary problems. These are the actual ethical dilemmas which confront thousands of modern Christians as they try to follow Jesus' rule of kindness.

IV

The third form which the conflict of duties assumes is less apparent than the two we have discussed but quite as significant. What should an individual do when his duty to be kind to someone else conflicts with his duty to be kind to himself? On hearing this question many people promptly assert that an individual does not have

the duty of being kind to himself. An individual's sole duty (so these people maintain) is to be kind to others, and in the process forget himself entirely, ignore his own needs completely. This theory, gallant though it is, is almost certainly wrong. Each one of us *does* have duties to himself, and when any one of us disregards those duties he does so at his own peril and—in some instances at least—at the risk of injuring great numbers of other people. Consider, for example, the two following situations.

An epidemic of influenza is raging in a certain community, and all the physicians in the community are working night and day to combat the disease. The doctor who, by common consent, is the leader in this struggle makes his way home late one night utterly exhausted. Just as he crawls into bed the telephone rings, and a stranger in a distant part of the city asks him to come at once to a house several miles away. Immediate medical aid is urgently needed there. The stranger confesses that he is sorry to disturb the doctor at such a late hour, but then goes on to explain that no other physician can be reached by telephone at the moment. Will the doctor not be kind and come at once? In such a situation what does it mean for the doctor to show kindness? Does it mean making the call, and running the risk of collapsing the next day? Or does it mean saying frankly

that he has not strength enough to start out again at midnight? Does being kind mean being kind to the stranger or being kind to the doctor?

Or here are two sisters who have reached middle age. The older sister is a teacher who for years has been saving petty amounts from her small salary. The slender fund she has thus accumulated is her sole protection against poverty when the compulsory retirement-age finally arrives. Meantime the younger sister has built up a small business, and from it is seeking to acquire a similar fund for her declining years. Unexpected reverses create a desperate financial situation for the younger sister, and reluctantly she turns to the older sister for aid. Will her sister lend her the savings which she has accumulated? In this emergency will she do the kind thing? Here we see, of course, a sharp conflict between the older sister's duty to be kind to someone else (in this case her own sister) and her duty to be kind to herself. If she rates the first of these duties ahead of the second, she will lend her sister the money. If she rates the second duty ahead of the first, she will refuse to lend the money. Which duty *should* she place first? To whom should the kindness which she proposes to show be shown?

Once we understand this third form of the conflict of duties we see the mistake which all mendicant Chris-

tians, ancient and modern, have made. These individuals refused to accumulate wealth of their own, insisted on sharing freely with others whatever property they chanced to possess at the moment, and then trusted their friends to provide for their subsequent needs. That the mendicants—in some instances, at least—showed admirable qualities of character we all agree. That they set a noble example of unselfishness to a world which finds it very easy to rationalize its greed we all admit. Yet the mendicants' way of living is fundamentally wrong. It is wrong because it persistently overlooks the individual's duty to show adequate kindness to himself. After all, every individual does have that duty—the duty of securing the necessary amount of clothing which his own body requires, the duty of securing the necessary amount of food which he must have if he is to live, and the duty of securing *and keeping* the amount of wealth which, when his years of youthful vigor are past, will provide for his inevitable needs and prevent him from becoming a public charge. It is dangerous to ignore our duties to other people: it is equally dangerous to ignore our duties to ourselves.

V

Why now do we raise all these questions and point out all these complexities? Because by doing so, and

only by doing so, can we make plain three important points. To begin with, such an analysis shows why it is hard to follow Jesus' apparently simple rule of kindness. It is hard to follow the rule because our duties frequently conflict, and because the task of evaluating and grading conflicting duties is often extremely difficult. Again, such an analysis explains why there are honest differences of opinion among equally sincere Christians as to the precise course of action which should be followed when duties conflict. The reason why these differences of opinion develop is that one Christian grades the conflicting duties in one order of importance, while another Christian (equally sincere) grades them in a different order. But the third point which our analysis makes plain is the most significant of all. Such a study of the conflict of duties discloses a concrete responsibility which is now devolving relentlessly on Christian parents and Christian leaders. Our social order is growing steadily more complex, and this means that the conflict of duties is becoming daily a more and more important factor in life. A time has now come when all those who exercise Christian leadership must explain to those under their charge what the conflict of duties is, what forms it assumes, why there are honest differences of opinion among Christians as to the precise course of action which should be followed when a conflict of

duties takes shape, and what the logic is which underlies each of the many different courses of action suggested in that situation. To do these things is to take the first step toward gaining, and helping others gain, a clear understanding of what it means to follow Jesus' rule of kindness in our sadly tangled modern world.

CHAPTER TEN

The Problem of Applying Jesus' Rule of Kindness

(b) In the Case of Social Groups

I

THE fact of the conflict of duties, which we discussed at some length in the preceding chapter, also helps us understand the social problems which are now perplexing multitudes of Christians. Once we realize that these problems demand that we show kindness simultaneously to several different groups, and once we realize that our task in such situations is to determine which group most deserves our kindness, we begin making ourselves able to locate for the particular problem in hand the solution which, everything considered, will probably prove best under the circumstances. That this solution will not prove ideal, and that it will disappoint all the groups which it does not favor, is obvious. But in a world in which duties conflict, and conflict stubbornly, is it ever possible to find an ideal solution for a complex problem? Is it ever possible to satisfy every party in a controversy?

In this chapter we shall consider briefly three of the

contemporary social problems, and show how each one involves ultimately a conflict of duties. Then we shall consider three further social problems in which there is also a conflict of duties, but a conflict of a somewhat less obvious type. In discussing all these problems we shall use examples which are concrete but wholly imaginary.

II

Some months ago the street-railway company in a certain city found itself in serious financial difficulties. During the pre-automobile days the company enjoyed great prosperity, extended its trolley lines widely, and sold bonds to cover the cost of this expansion. The interest on these bonds was always paid promptly and in full, and the rate of interest offered was so high that the bonds were eagerly purchased by the general public. As a matter of fact the bonds were sought with particular zeal by churches, colleges, and investment bankers who were administering the funds of widows and orphans. Where was there a better place in which to put an endowment, or the money paid on a life insurance policy?

But with the coming of the automobile and the development of bus lines, the street-railway company found itself in ever-deepening trouble. The company's

income from trolley fares declined steadily, and in spite of every possible economy in operation the company's annual statement began to show a loss rather than a profit. Finally, after the salaries of all the "white collar workers" in the company's employ had been cut, the company announced that the wages of the motormen and the conductors on all its lines would have to be cut too. Unless some such saving in operating costs could be achieved, the company would have to go into bankruptcy. On receiving this announcement the motormen and conductors immediately went on strike, and then presented an appealing case to the general public. If their wages were reduced, their wages would fall below the level recently announced by an impartial committee as the "living-wage level" for that community. After weeks of futile negotiation between the company and the strikers, the issue was referred to a small group of outside arbitrators. Thereupon this committee made an entirely new suggestion. It was that the company be reorganized financially, that new bonds be issued in place of the old, that the interest-rate on these new bonds be made much lower than the interest-rate on the old bonds, and that one new bond be given for each two old bonds of similar denomination. From the large savings thus effected in bond-interest the company could keep itself solvent, and the motormen and conductors could

be paid the living-wage they obviously deserved and needed.

But what was the fate of this suggestion? Instantly the bondholders pointed out the fact that under the proposed arrangement they would be penalized for the benefit of the strikers, and that the money they had a right to expect as interest on their bonds would be paid to the motormen and the conductors in order to maintain the standard of living of the motormen and the conductors. In the meantime what would happen to the standard of living of the widows and orphans whose meager funds had been invested in these bonds, and to the standard of living of the college professors and ministers whose salaries were being paid from endowments composed largely of these securities? So the controversy deepened, and finally a complete impasse was reached. Each party to the controversy demanded that kindness be shown *in its particular direction,* and unfortunately wholly new economic and social conditions made it impossible to show kindness to everyone. Which group, then, should be sacrificed? Or should there be a certain amount of sacrifice all around?

It is a conflict of duties of this type which emerges in hundreds of contemporary situations involving what is now popularly called "economic justice." The difficulty in these situations is the difficulty of determining to

which one of several rival groups kindness—or even ordinary justice—should be shown. Need we add that the problem of making this decision wisely is one which taxes even the keenest mind? Need we add that whatever decision is finally reached, there will invariably be many Christians—and well-informed and sincere Christians too—who will grade the conflicting duties in a different order, and who will therefore disagree flatly with the proposed solution of the problem?

III

Recently a large group of Christians gathered in a certain city for a religious conference. Delegates from many parts of the country were present, among them several colored people. It had been understood that the hotel in which the delegates were to be entertained would make no discrimination between white and colored guests, and that the few colored delegates at the conference would be given free access to all the dining-rooms in the hotel. Unfortunately, however, the delegates to the conference were not numerous enough to utilize all the rooms in the hotel, and therefore many guests who were not connected with the conference registered at the hotel at the time the conference was gathering there. Some of these individuals happened to

come from the deep South, and—rightly or wrongly—they were not willing to eat in dining-rooms in which both white people and colored people were served simultaneously. When these Southern guests found that colored delegates were enrolled at the conference, and when they learned that these colored delegates were to have free access to all the dining-rooms in the hotel, they immediately protested. They reminded the manager of the hotel that they had engaged their accommodations on the assumption that the hotel did not cater to "mixed trade," and that their habits and traditions (whether justified or not) would compel them to leave the hotel if both white guests and colored guests were to be entertained simultaneously there. Would the manager not be kind enough to suggest to the committee in charge of the conference that the colored delegates be sent to another hotel?

When, however, the manager reported this request to the leaders of the conference, they promptly countered with a different request. Would the manager of the hotel not be kind to the colored delegates—kind by setting an example of interracial friendship, and announcing that the colored delegates could remain, and should remain, where they were? The resultant difficulty was of course the difficulty of resolving a conflict of duties. The manager of the hotel faced the obligation of being

kind to each of two rival groups—the colored people who wanted to stay in the hotel, and the guests from the deep South who wanted them to go elsewhere. When duties thus conflicted, to which one of the two groups should the manager show his kindness?

It is this same conflict of duties which emerges in scores of modern situations in which racial contacts are involved. To rate the rival duties in the right order usually proves an extraordinarily difficult task, and to win universal approval for the particular grading of duties which one finally devises always proves impossible. The only thing a thoughtful Christian can do is identify the conflicting duties accurately, study them carefully, arrange them in what seems to him the fairest order, and then brace himself to endure the objections and criticisms which will inevitably come to him from the individuals who in perfect sincerity arrange these same duties in a different sequence.

IV

When the Italian army invaded Ethiopia in 1935 a certain Ethiopian Christian resolved to follow Jesus' rule of kindness, follow it without wavering. Was that not an ideal time in which to show the Christian spirit? But when, in that particular situation, this Ethiopian at-

tempted to put his resolution into practice, he speedily found himself beset by wholly unexpected difficulties. To which of the many different groups about him should his kindness be shown?

If he decided to be kind to the invading Italians he would, of course, offer them no resistance as they marched through his village on their way to the capital of his country. He might even make his kindness active rather than passive, and so give the Italians food, shelter and directions for reaching Addis Ababa by the quickest and easiest route. If, on the contrary, this Ethiopian Christian decided to be kind to the members of his own community rather than to the invading Italians, he would join the Ethiopian army and do his best to block the Italians' advance. Only if that advance were blocked could Ethiopia maintain her independence, and the villagers remain in possession of their property. To which group, Italians or natives, should this puzzled Christian be kind?

If in his quandary this Ethiopian looked to the groups outside his own country, his difficulties would become greater rather than less. In Europe and America this Ethiopian would discover thousands of individuals who were convinced that the Italian attack was a deliberate act of aggression, and that for the sake of international law and order in the future Ethiopia should fight. If the

Ethiopian Christian were kind to this group of outsiders, he would join the Ethiopian army without delay. But meantime another outside group was claiming that the process of killing Italian conscripts was not the best way by which to establish worldwide security. Let the Ethiopians offer no resistance, let them appeal to the moral judgment of mankind, let them set an example of the use of "soul-force" in meeting an unjust assault! If the Ethiopian Christian were kind to this group of outsiders, he would refrain from joining the Ethiopian army. To which of the two groups should the kindness he, as a Christian, proposed to show be shown?

This, as we all realize, is the quandary in which every sincere Christian finds himself in time of war. If a Christian's own country is being invaded by a foreign foe, the Christian's problem is difficult enough: if the Christian's nation is taking part in the invasion of another country, the Christian's difficulties become even greater. The differences of opinion which arise between different Christians on the matter of wartime duty are not—necessarily—differences which are rooted in mental dullness or moral blindness. In numberless cases those differences of opinion represent the different answers which different individuals, equally well-informed and equally sincere, make to the bewildering problem of the conflict of duties. This is the situation which we discover repeat-

edly in cases involving economic conflict, and in cases involving racial conflict. It is also the situation which we discover when nations engage in war, and when Christians are forced to decide which one of many rival groups has the major claim on their loyalty.

V

There is one more phase of the conflict of duties which must be mentioned as we bring our analysis to a close. Sometimes the duties which conflict in a given situation are duties to rival individuals, and sometimes they are duties to rival groups. Occasionally, however, the conflict is one between a duty to an individual and a duty to a group. At first glance it might seem easy to resolve this final type of conflict—resolve it by saying that our duty to a group should always take precedence over our duty to an individual, because our kindness should always be shown to the larger rather than the smaller number of human beings. But in practice the task of resolving this particular conflict sometimes presents grave difficulties. To recognize this form of the conflict of duties and to understand the source of the difficulties which it creates, is to take the first step toward an intelligent solution of the problems which situations of this type produce.

Consider, to begin with, the case of the parking-space attendant (see pp. 92-4) who was forced to choose between being kind to an escaped convict and being kind to the policeman who was trying to recapture the convict. In this situation the policeman was, of course, the representative of the large group composed of the law-abiding citizens in the community. Here, then, the duties between which a choice had to be made were a duty to an individual (the convict) and a duty to a group (the better citizens of the community, typified by the policeman). In this case most of us would agree that the duty to the group should take precedence over the duty to the individual, and therefore that the parking-space attendant should show kindness to the policeman even though this action meant showing unkindness to the convict. It is this logic which underlies the general practice to which we referred when we discussed this case in the preceding chapter—the practice of co-operating with the authorities rather than giving aid to stray criminals. It is this logic which also explains the action of intelligent Christians in refusing to release a law-breaker from jail even though granting such release would undoubtedly be a kind act to the law-breaker. By keeping the criminal in confinement Christians are showing kindness to the community at large, and doing so (unfortunately) at the inevitable price of showing unkindness to the indi-

vidual whose record shows that he is a dangerous member of society.

Essentially the same conflict of duties emerges when a Christian is asked to formulate a policy with reference to divorce accompanied by the privilege of remarriage. In this case what are the two duties which conflict? The first is the duty of showing kindness to an individual whose marriage has proved unsuccessful. The second is the duty of showing kindness to the community at large —a vast group of human beings that is trying to maintain the solemnity and the permanence of the marriage-relationship. If a Christian advocates a policy of utterly free divorce (similar, for example, to the policy followed in Russia during the early 1930's), this will mean showing kindness to the individuals whose marriage experience has proved unhappy, and who are eager to find new mates. If, on the other hand, a Christian advocates a policy of carefully-restricted divorce or no divorce at all, then this action will (probably) mean showing kindness to the community at large. At any rate it will tend to support the community's effort to prevent hasty marriages, to force married couples to make every effort to adjust their difficulties peaceably, and to protect the rights of children. In this case should the duty to the group be given precedence over the duty to the individual? Should it *always* be given such prece-

dence? Is there a way by which the clash of duties can be softened, and kindness shown in some situations to the individual and in other situations to the community? In an earlier chapter (see pp. 52-4) we noted some of the difficulties which the early Christians faced as they grappled with this problem. Needless to say, no ideal solution for the problem has yet been discovered.

In this same conflict of duties—a conflict between one's duty to an individual and one's duty to a group—lies the clue to an understanding of another complex problem. Is it right for a doctor to accede to the request of an individual who is incurably ill and who wants to die, and either kill the individual or permit the individual to kill himself? This is the problem which emerges in the case of the "mercy killings" which occasionally gain wide publicity in the press, and which also emerges—more often than the general public realizes—in the case of elderly invalids whose recovery is (barring a miracle) impossible. Should the doctor, or the individual in charge of the patient, force the patient to continue living and suffering? Would it not be a kind thing to enable the patient to gain quick and painless escape from further agony? Here, of course, the question is to which one of two rival parties the proposed kindness should be shown. Should it be shown to the individual who wants to die, or should it be

shown to the community which is trying to maintain an all-important tradition of respect for human life? In the final analysis the security of the community, and of all the individuals who live in the community, depends on the maintenance of the tradition that human life must not be destroyed. Once that tradition fades or loses its power, everyone's existence is imperilled. The traditional belief that it is wrong to kill cripples and invalids, even when these individuals actually want to die, does not rest on blind prejudice or stupid conservatism. It rests on the conviction that the conflict of duties which emerges in this instance should be resolved by deliberately placing our duty to the group ahead of our duty to the individual.

VI

Why do we raise all these questions? Why do we make it seem so hard to follow Jesus' rule of kindness? Because it *is* hard to follow that rule, and because Christians must be led to recognize that fact. Today Christians everywhere agree that it is not enough to persuade individuals to try to follow Jesus' way of living: in addition society itself must be rebuilt in accordance with Jesus' ideals. Specifically this means applying Jesus' rule of kindness to all human relation-

ships, and devising a social order in which this rule can be, and will be, habitually followed. In the attempt to create such a social order all of us who count ourselves Christians are now seeking to build a better economic system, eliminate racial conflicts and hatreds, and organize the nations for peace rather than for war. In addition we are trying to deal more considerately with criminals, trying to find a better solution for the baffling problem of unhappy marriages, and trying to eliminate needless pain from the lives of all who are crippled, diseased or old. At first glance it might seem easy to apply Jesus' rule of kindness in each of these situations, but experience shows that applying the rule is anything but easy. To recognize our difficulties, to know why they arise, to train ourselves to evaluate conflicting duties accurately, and then to realize in advance that our own solution of the immediate problem—whatever that solution happens to be—will not command universal agreement, is to take the first step toward an understanding of the problems involved in building a Christian social order.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Tasks Now Confronting American Protestants

I

THE analysis which these chapters have attempted gradually discloses the four basic tasks which now confront American Protestants, particularly those who occupy positions of leadership and influence. The first of these tasks is of course to decide which of the three different conceptions of Jesus (outlined in the first chapter of this book) is presumably the most accurate. As we pointed out on page 6, this decision must be made by each individual Protestant for himself. Was Jesus the supernatural being pictured clearly on the pages of the New Testament? Or was Jesus the human being whose figure is faintly discernible behind the existing records? Or was Jesus, as the middle-of-the-road group within Protestantism maintains, a unique individual who somehow combined deity and humanity, and whose recorded words are usually (but not invariably) true and authoritative? To choose carefully and wisely between these three contrasting interpretations of Jesus is the first and most obvious task confronting every American Protestant today.

Is this choice an important matter? It is immensely important because it predetermines the attitude which the individual who makes the choice will take toward Jesus' words and Jesus' example. Suppose a person finally concludes that Jesus was in reality the supernatural being of whom the New Testament so obviously speaks: what then? That person will (if he is consistent) promptly accept Jesus' teachings as true in every detail, and promptly give himself to the task of following Jesus' example with painstaking care. Is it conceivable that a Jesus who was actually the Son of God could have made even one mistake? But suppose a person finally concludes that Jesus was, in all probability, a human being around whom devoted followers in subsequent years wove glittering garments of divinity: what then? Such a person will (if he is consistent) realize that this human Jesus was undoubtedly right in some of his opinions and undoubtedly wrong in others, and will then undertake the difficult task attempted by this book—the task of differentiating between the transient and the permanent elements in Jesus' teaching and example. Suppose now a person adopts the middle-of-the-road position, and regards Jesus as a unique being in whom divine and human qualities were strangely mingled, whose words were usually (though not always) infallibly true, and the record of whose

teaching is usually (though not always) trustworthy in every detail. What attitude will such a person take toward Jesus' teaching and example? Such a person will face difficulties even greater than those faced by either the conservative Protestant or the liberal Protestant. This person will (if he is consistent) inquire at each point in the gospel narrative whether *at that point* Jesus was speaking and acting in his divine capacity or his human one, and whether the words and the actions reported at that point in the narrative have therefore a more-than-human or only a human authority. The Fundamentalist and the Modernist make their decision about Jesus once and for all, and then follow unswervingly the course which that single decision in reference to Jesus' nature charts out for them. The middle-of-the-road Protestant (if he is consistent) is forced to make a fresh decision at each point in the gospel record. It is this difficult situation which accounts in large part for the fact that middle-of-the-road Protestants tend to move (usually unconsciously) to either the right or the left, and thus gradually become either out-and-out conservatives or out-and-out liberals.

II

The second task now confronting every American Protestant (assuming that he takes his religion seriously)

is to discover what Jesus actually taught. Whatever antecedent position a given individual adopts in reference to Jesus himself, this second responsibility follows swiftly. What were the beliefs which Jesus tried to spread? What were the courses of action which he followed as he encountered life's inevitable problems? Unfortunately many if not most American Protestants today refuse to face this second task with any real seriousness. They seldom if ever read books which analyze Jesus' beliefs carefully, and they certainly never make an effort to analyze the gospel record themselves and then formulate an original summary of Jesus' teachings. Asked to define Jesus' message they reply vaguely that he taught "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man." Asked to state what his position was in reference to concrete individual or social problems, they retreat even further into vagueness and say that Jesus' effort was "to bring a new spirit into human relationships." It is this deplorable indefiniteness which characterizes much Protestant preaching today, and which permeates much if not most of the instruction in our Protestant Sunday Schools. The result of this unhappy situation is that the average adult Protestant today finds it difficult if not impossible to compare his religion (as a system of teaching) with any one of the rival faiths, and that the average Protestant child today

reveals an abysmal ignorance of the essentials of Christianity. One of the distressing experiences which comes to any individual who, like the author of this book, teaches and preaches at many schools and colleges, is the discovery that Protestant boys and girls often reach preparatory school or even college without gaining—either from their minister, their Sunday School teacher or their parents—any clear conception of the distinctive ideas and ideals of the religion in which they were born, and in which they are supposed to have been bred. For this situation the deplorable vagueness of contemporary Protestant preaching and contemporary Protestant Sunday School instruction is largely responsible.

When an individual has determined, either from reading or from his own personal study, what Jesus actually taught and did, then that individual will of course follow one of the three roads to which we referred in the preceding section of this chapter. He will follow Jesus literally, or he will follow him intelligently (that is, with discrimination), or he will study each separate word and action of Jesus and then try to determine whether that particular word or action possesses divine or only human authority. If its authority is divine, then the individual will (if he is consistent) count himself bound to accept it. If its authority is only

human, then the individual will feel free to make cautious personal reservations before accepting it. But whichever one of these three roads a given Protestant follows, a clear understanding of Jesus' actual teachings and Jesus' actual attitudes in concrete life-situations is essential.

III

The two remaining tasks now devolving on American Protestants affect only the liberal group. If an individual finally concludes, as the author of this book has concluded, that Jesus was a human being who became the world's most significant teacher in the field of religion and ethics, but who was in no sense a supernatural being who possessed infallibility, then this individual faces two tasks in addition to those already mentioned in this chapter. He must try to make some such summary of the significant teachings of Jesus as the one which was attempted in Chapter Seven of this book. Or, to put the matter differently, he must try to decide—for himself, of course—what it is that Jesus really has to say to him and his generation. Then, when these "essentials of Christianity" are clearly formulated in his own mind, he must try to find the ways by which these essentials of Christianity can be made an effective

part of his own thinking and living, and an effective part of the thinking and living of his generation. These two final tasks devolve on all liberal Protestants who take their religion with any seriousness: they devolve with special solemnity on those individuals who, as ministers, Sunday School teachers or parents, occupy positions of influence and leadership within the liberal group.

Does not the glimpse of these two final tasks suggest a definite piece of work which liberal ministers, Sunday School teachers and parents can undertake at once? To discover, within the complex mass of Jesus' recorded sayings, the permanently significant elements in Jesus' teaching, may well be made a project for an adult study-group within a church, for a Sunday School class composed of older boys and girls, or even for a family-unit. To discuss the different ways suggested for the application of Jesus' rule of kindness in a concrete modern situation, and to determine which of these ways seems most likely to be successful on a long-term basis, may well be made a further project for any or all of these groups. The material presented in this book was thus employed in a class of some ninety upperclassmen at a New England college in the spring of 1936, and was then employed again in an adult study-group of some sixty men and women in a New England church

during the winter of 1936–37. Similar efforts—efforts to determine what Christianity really stands for, and efforts to discover how to practice Christianity in concrete modern situations—are now being undertaken in many colleges and churches, Sunday Schools and homes. In these efforts lies one of the evidences of the vitality of liberal Protestantism in the United States today. To these efforts more and more of our liberal Protestant leaders must be persuaded to devote their attention and their energy in the coming years.

IV

All this helps us see what the future probably holds for American Protestantism. The conservative group within American Protestantism will undoubtedly persist—always seeking to persuade men that Jesus was a supernatural being, and always trying to lead men to accept Jesus' teachings and follow Jesus' example in literal or almost literal fashion. If the premise which this group holds (that Jesus was the Incarnate Son of God) is granted, then the conclusions which this group reaches and the practical program which it recommends follow inevitably. The middle-of-the-road group within American Protestantism will probably tend to divide between the conservatives and the liberals, doing so for

the reason which we suggested in the first section of this chapter. This process will undoubtedly be very slow, and will always be kept slow by the tendency of most people to think vaguely and emotionally rather than analytically. It is this tendency which makes many individuals remain permanently in the middle-of-the-road group when a few hours of careful study would inevitably push them either to the right or to the left. What now is the probable future of the liberal group within American Protestantism today?

Several current developments within this group are highly encouraging. Many of our liberal Protestant leaders are now making some such frank analysis of Jesus' teachings as this book has attempted. Many of our ministers, Sunday School teachers and parents are now organizing some such study-groups as the ones suggested in the preceding section of this chapter. Best of all, multitudes of individuals within the liberal Protestant constituency are beginning to realize that it is a difficult rather than an easy task to follow Jesus today, and are beginning to give to that task an unprecedented amount of careful thinking. What will be the ultimate fruit of all these efforts? From them will come, so some of us believe, two things which have never been known in Protestantism before. One is a clear understanding of Jesus' ideas—his ideas which have proved false, and

his ideas which have proved true. The other is a clear understanding of the ways by which Jesus' rule of kindness can best be followed in the new and complex social order of today. These two new things are the gift of modern liberal Protestantism to the future. Out of them will come, gradually but inevitably, that new technique of Christian living for which both the modern church and the modern world are now waiting.

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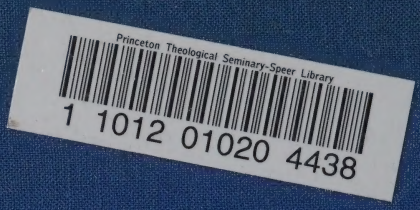
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